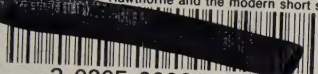


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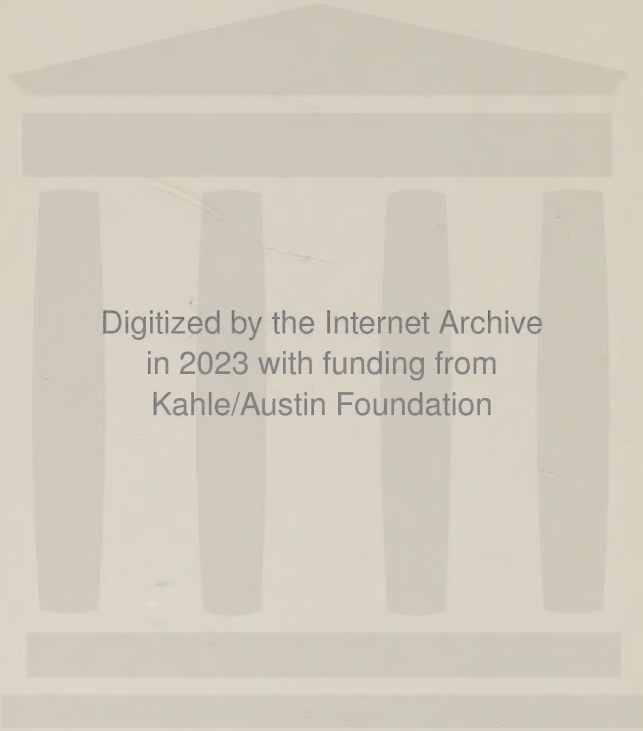
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**Rohrberger**

# **HAWTHORNE AND THE MODERN SHORT STORY**







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# HAWTHORNE AND THE MODERN SHORT STORY



# STUDIES IN GENERAL AND COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

*Volume II*



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# HAWTHORNE AND THE MODERN SHORT STORY

*A STUDY IN GENRE*

by

MARY ROHRBERGER  
*Oklahoma State University*

**DISCARDED**

NORMANDALE COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
9700 FRANCE AVENUE SOUTH  
BLOOMINGTON, MINNESOTA 55431



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M. R.



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## I

### THE SHORT STORY AS A LITERARY FORM: A PROBLEM IN DEFINITION

The excellence and popularity of the modern short story is indisputable. Although some may consider it lamentable, fiction has displaced poetry in the modern taste, and the length of the short story seems to make it particularly appropriate to our fast moving world. The number of first rate authors who have tried their hands at the genre reads like a list of the most important writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the last century — Poe, Hawthorne, Melville. In this century — Conrad, Mansfield, Lawrence, Anderson, Hemingway, Welty — to name just a few who are commonly recognized as masters of the form. And these are just the English and American authors. When we add the names of Chekhov, de Maupassant, Mann, Kafka, our list becomes impressive indeed. The popularity of the short story is attested not only by the number and stature of authors who write it, but also by the number of critics and scholars who have found the form fruitful for study and analysis — Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, Ray B. West, Robert Wooster Stallman, H. E. Bates, Mark Schorer — again to mention only a few.

Those scholars who consider the short story to be simply a brief tale well told find examples of this form in *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, and *The Arabian Nights*, in *The Decameron* and *The Canterbury Tales*, in *The New Testament* and *The Old Testament*, in literary fables, fairy tales, and ancient myths. But the people who identify the short story in this way and who point out such early examples as I mention are in the minority group of students of the form who, for the most part, feel that

the short story is a young art and that there is something quite different about the short stories that began to appear in the early nineteenth century and those pieces of short fiction which came earlier. Some scholars feel that the Russian Nikolai Gogol was the first great practitioner of the short story; others feel that it had its real beginnings in American literature. Some of the latter group point to Washington Irving, to such stories as "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow", and say that in transferring Germanic motifs to the Sleepy Hollow locale Irving unconsciously invented a new genre. Others feel that the short story developed through Irving, Hawthorne, and Poe, that it was a gradually evolving form, still, though, American in origin. It seems to me that Nathaniel Hawthorne was the first to write a short story that had the characteristics of the modern short story. As early as 1832 Hawthorne published a story which has only in recent years begun to get a great deal of attention from critics and scholars, a story called "My Kinsman, Major Molineux", and this one is as modern in technique and structure, indeed, even in subject matter as any by the modern writers I mentioned earlier. But whether the originator of the form be Gogol, Irving, Poe, or Hawthorne, or someone not yet mentioned, the preponderance of critical opinion tends to the view that the short story is a relatively new form, having its beginnings sometime early in the last century.

It is also clear that unlike the novel which arose from the movement toward realism in English literature, the short story has its beginnings in romanticism, in myths and legends, in the supernatural. Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow", an abundance of Gogol's and Poe's stories, and even Hawthorne's deal in some way with a world different from the ordinary world of mundane fact. In approaching these stories the reader is asked to put the extensional world out of his mind. He is asked to believe in the authenticity of a nether world.

The realistic movement began when men came to believe that the world could be discovered through the senses. Emphasis came to be put on the individual response to the outside



world. But with the movement toward romanticism, men began to assert that there is more to the world than that which can be discovered through the senses, that there is what might be called an underworld, no less real. The attempts by authors such as Irving and Hawthorne in prefaces to their tales to assert the authenticity of the reported experiences attest to this feeling. Irving, Gogol, Poe, Hawthorne present the supernatural as though it is real, and in so doing they assert its reality.

Scholars also agree that Edgar Allan Poe was the first theorizer upon the new form. The passage that I quote is well known to every student of literature:

A skilful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single *effect* to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents — he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbrining of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. And by such means, with such skill and care, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction.<sup>1</sup>

Now if this description of the artfully constructed tale is accepted as the first attempt by a critic to theorize upon the form of the short story, then it is clear that for better than a hundred years there has been little divergence in our conception of what constitutes it. Poe, of course, did not speak of a new literary genre in his well-known review of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*; nor did he use the name short story in describing what Hawthorne wrote; nevertheless, the qualities of the tale which he stressed were those which subsequent theorists used to assert the appearance of a new genre. Poe wrote in the 1840's. In the 1880's Brander Matthews actually asserted that the short story was a distinct genre, a separate kind, a genus by itself.<sup>2</sup> Poe's

<sup>1</sup> Poe's review first appeared in *Graham's Magazine* for May, 1842.

<sup>2</sup> *The Philosophy of the Short Story* (1901). This study is an extended version of an article first appearing in the *Saturday Review* of London in the summer of 1884.

insistence that the tale must be devised with a single effect in mind was the basis for Matthews' differentiation of the short story from other prose forms. The short story, Matthews maintained, has a unity of impression which the sketch or tale does not have and which the novel cannot have. With this distinction of kind as a base, Matthews went on to formulate the now generally accepted conditions of the genre. The short story, he said, deals with a single character, a single event, a single emotion, or the series of emotions called forth by a single situation.

In the study of the short story Matthews' work was of great historical importance. Following the publication of his study, commentators who approached the short story as a distinct genre took their critical approach from him. Although they acknowledged Poe as the first theorizer upon the form, they discussed the short story in the terms that Matthews set forth. Matthews had not altogether minimized Poe's importance. He had admitted that Poe was aware that the tale of which he wrote was a distinct kind, but Matthews believed that Poe did not formulate the distinction. Nevertheless, it is clear that Poe's review had profound effect on Matthews as well as on those students of the form who came after him. The short story, it is commonly agreed, has unity of effect with its concomitant freedom from excrescence, firmly knit plot, brevity. Poe's influence on such a description is obvious. The unity-directed tale of which he wrote provided the real foundation for all subsequent discussions from Brander Matthews, who based his laws of the genre upon a unity of impression, to modern editors of short story anthologies, who discuss short stories as finished, artistic, and closely wrought fictional forms.

I am going to attempt further description of the short story. In so doing it is not my purpose to dispute the earlier statements. I shall accept without additional comment the idea that the short story is a piece of prose fiction that is characterized by brevity, closely wrought texture, and unity of impression, merely noting as I go along that this kind of statement does nothing more than assert the short story to be an art form, a statement with which I have no kind of quarrel. I shall also

accept the qualification which delineates the short story as dealing with a single character, a single event, and a single emotion, recognizing that although there are exceptions to this description, still it does, in a measure, particularize the great bulk of stories. What I mean to do is to attempt further description of the structure of the short story with the thought that to extend description is more closely to approach a position from which a critic might make valid judgment.

I cannot agree with those students of the short story who despair of further attempts to describe the genre, those who feel that the most that can be said is that the short story is a story that is short. There are problems inherent in such an approach to definition as there are in the definition that we have, for the less precise a definition, the greater the problem of literary judgment. John Gardner and Lennis Dunlap have recently discussed this issue.<sup>3</sup> As they point out, if one considers Thurber's moral fables to be of the same genre as other, more complicated, stories, then, in comparison, Thurber's pieces must be considered inferior. Short narrative fiction has been with us for many centuries, but we do not call all short narrative fiction short stories. And there is no reason to believe that every piece of short narrative fiction written today takes the form of the short story or even that every piece characterized by unity of impression and a closely wrought texture must be a short story. The categories that we have must be workable, or valid literary judgments will be impossible. No one would use the same standard to judge a lyric poem and an heroic ode.

The description of the short story that I shall present will be based upon a selection of the short stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne and those of representative modern writers. I chose Hawthorne not only because his importance as a writer of short stories is generally recognized, but also because as early as 1832 he wrote a story which stands as a prototype of the modern short story and further because it was, after all, in a review of Hawthorne's tales that Poe set down his famous dicta concerning the artfully constructed tale.

<sup>3</sup> *The Forms of Fiction* (1962).

With the primary purpose of trying to describe genre, I have approached this study with the thought that should there be distinct likenesses in the stories of Hawthorne and the more modern practitioners of the art, an examination of these traits would be valuable in an attempted definition. In every manifestation of a literary form there should be characteristics which distinguish it from other forms. This kind of differentiation is made in the classification of all objects. Tables, for example, may exist in varying heights, be made from different woods or other materials, and have diverse ornamentation, but every table has a flat surface which is fixed on legs. It is to this kind of classification that I have directed my efforts, and I have found that in the short story certain similarities in technique and structure do exist. My final statement concerning the form of the short story is based on these similarities and not on any intrinsic differences. Each writer has a recognizable style, distinctive themes, and certain technical devices which are peculiarly his. William Faulkner's stories, for example, may be immediately recognized as different from Katherine Mansfield's, and Ernest Hemingway's stories are clearly distinguishable from Sherwood Anderson's. It is not my purpose to discuss these differences, for if the assumption that I make has any validity, then it is to the similarities that we must look to find the basic characteristics of the genre.

Nor will I be immediately concerned with the differences between the short story and the novel. Such differences do exist and in terms other than length, but I postpone a discussion of these differences until I have demonstrated a basic similarity in structure among short stories. In the meantime, it must be remembered that I am aware that the authors of whom I write produced, many of them, both short stories and longer pieces and that their literary theory, which I shall discuss, embraced the whole of their fiction.

I am also aware that a study of this kind cannot be exhaustive and that any conclusion must be tentative. The great number of short stories makes impossible any statement but an empirical one. As a matter of fact, the number of modern short stories

presented an immediate problem in selection. There were two possibilities, each having advantages and disadvantages. The first approach I considered was that of choosing a great number of stories, thereby giving a large sampling. But this method would permit only limited discussion and superficial treatment. The alternative was choosing fewer stories, thereby making possible a closer analysis and a more valid judgment. But to use this approach was to run the risk of being accused of providing too few examples on which to base a conclusion. I decided on a modified version of the latter approach; that is, I made an effort to choose representative stories by generally recognized masters of the short story form. My selection of particular stories was based on their many appearances in anthologies. By thus choosing stories which are commonly accepted as typical of the genre I have hoped to gather as much evidence as possible to indicate a clear pattern which would furnish a basis for a definitive statement.



## II

### HAWTHORNE'S LITERARY THEORY AND ITS RELATION TO HIS SHORT STORIES

For many years Hawthorne was considered to have had a rather simple approach to esthetics, if, indeed, he had one at all. The usually perceptive Henry James appears to have overlooked Hawthorne's awareness of theory when he asserted Hawthorne's literary naiveté. "Hawthorne", James wrote, "was not a man with a literary theory; he was guiltless of a system, and I am not sure that he had ever heard of realism."<sup>1</sup> It is true that Hawthorne never wrote an essay especially devoted to literary doctrine, but many of his prefaces, at least one sketch, and several of his well-known essays reveal his great preoccupation with literary principles and indicate that he was a highly conscious artist knowledgeable in the techniques that he used to create his fiction.

Hawthorne's theory involves not only an awareness of the essential differences between art and life, an awareness which is basic to an esthetic approach, but also a knowledge of particular devices and situations that aid in the creation of the art object as an illusion of the real. He is aware of techniques that will produce the effects which he desires, and he recognizes their value in the creative process. From a basically metaphysical approach he attempts to evaluate the art object and to fix its status in the real world. His definition of his particular form of writing represents his attempt to grasp the essential nature of the world by means of art. In a sense, it is also an attempt to assert the ontological status of the art form as a means of approaching that which is unchanging and real, as

<sup>1</sup> *Hawthorne* (1879), p. 4.



distinct from the ever-shifting matters of fact of the ordinary world of experience.

The theorist who attempts to assert that the art form is essentially a closer approximation to the unchanging realities of life than is the extensional world sometimes involves himself in an apparent contradiction. For most assuredly art is not life. What the artist creates is an illusion of the real. The author manipulates certain facts and uses certain devices to aid in the illusion. Different authors use different facts and different devices, but they all use some means to entice the reader, to seduce him, into accepting the illusion for the real. Hawthorne never seems to fall into contradiction; he appears to be perfectly conscious that in his art form he is working with "a tribe of unrealities"<sup>2</sup> and that he, as author, must make them "look like truth" (V, p. 56). Consequently, he is aware of the author's need to create an illusion. In "The Custom House" essay prefacing *The Scarlet Letter*, he speaks of certain devices that aid him in his creative process:

Moonlight, in a familiar room, falling so white upon the carpet, and showing all its figures so distinctly, — making every object so minutely visible, yet so unlike a morning or noontide visibility, — is a medium the most suitable for a romance-writer to get acquainted with his illusive guests. There is the little domestic scenery of the well-known apartment; the chairs with each its separate individuality; the centre-table, sustaining a work-basket, a volume or two, and an extinguished lamp; the sofa; the bookcase; the picture on the wall, — all these details, so completely seen, are so spiritualized by the unusual light, that they seem to lose their actual substance, and become things of intellect. . . . Thus, therefore, the floor of our familiar room has become a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other. (V, pp. 54-55)

The half-lights from the coal fire function similarly to the moonlight for Hawthorne. These half-lights glimmer over matters of fact and half obscure them, enabling him to see beyond the

<sup>2</sup> *The Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. G. P. Lathrop (1883), V, p. 54. Future citations are to this edition.

facts, allowing him to penetrate through them to a deeper reality.<sup>3</sup>

Not only does the author have to penetrate through the world of mundane fact in order to grasp the essential reality, but the reader also must be separated from the real world so that he will be able to accept the artistic illusion. The reader, too, needs something that will half obscure the facts. He needs to make an effort similar to the one the writer makes — in a sense, to take the same point of view. Estheticians describe this concept of a necessary separation between beholder and art object as psychic distance, which disengages the beholder from the real world and enables him to accept the artistic illusion as real. Hawthorne was certainly familiar with this concept and with the relationship between psychic distance in its effect on the beholder and as an aid in the creative process itself.

In the preface to *Twice-Told Tales* Hawthorne identifies the half-light that allows his imagination to function creatively with the half-light that helps the reader to take the point of view that will maintain the necessary distance. "The book", he says, "if you would see anything in it, requires to be read in the clear, brown, twilight atmosphere in which it was written; if opened in the sunshine, it is apt to look exceedingly like a volume of blank pages" (I, p. 16). Half-lights, however, are not the only means by which an author may induce the reader to accept the artistic illusion.

Hawthorne points out in the preface to *The House of the Seven Gables* that the narrative is woven of such texture as to allow the reader to float along on a "legendary mist" of a bygone time. This epoch, Hawthorne says, is now "gray in the distance" (III, p. 14). In the preface to his next novel, *The Blithedale Romance*, Hawthorne again mentions an out-of-the-way setting. The setting, he says, is used merely to establish a theatre a little removed from the highway of ordinary travel (V,

<sup>3</sup> Light from the coal fire mingles with light from the moonbeams and communicates a human tenderness to the forms which fancy summons up. It appears that Hawthorne sees the warmer light of the fire as a synthesizing agent in the imaginative process.

pp. 321-322). Again in the preface to *The Marble Faun* Hawthorne notes the need for distance in the literary illusion. "Italy as the site of his Romance", he says, "was chiefly valuable . . . as affording a sort of poetic or fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon. . . ." (VI, p. 15).

These statements would by themselves prove Hawthorne's familiarity with the concept of psychic distance and his knowledge of devices for maintaining the illusion of reality. But his awareness is made more explicit in the sketch called "Main Street". In this sketch a showman attempts to present a pictorial exhibition, somewhat in the nature of a puppet show. The showman stands before his audience and begins to set his scene, but he is interrupted by a critic who sits in the front row. The critic breaks into the narrative to object. The setting, he says, does not look real. The showman answers, "Human art has its limitations, and we must now and then ask a little aid from the spectator's imagination" (III, p. 442). The showman goes on, but he is again interrupted by the critic, who objects to the characterization. These people, says the critic, are but pasteboard figures. The showman answers, "But, sir, you have not the proper point of view. . . . You sit altogether too near to get the best effect. . . . Pray, oblige me by removing to this other bench, and I venture to assure you the proper light and shadow will transform the spectacle into quite another thing" (III, pp. 447-448). The showman goes on, but the critic again interrupts. He complains that there is no exactitude of historical fact. The showman answers mildly, "Sir, you break the illusion of the scene" (III, p. 454).

"Main Street" might further be used as a basis for a discussion of Hawthorne's feelings concerning the value of the artistic illusion. The critic in the sketch objects to unreal settings, pasteboard figures that stand for characters, and the showman's lack of attention to the probability of the action and to historical fact. The showman is concerned with maintaining an illusion of the real. He desires to show an underlying truth that is permanent despite evidences of apparent change. His desire, then, is to get at a deeper reality than that which is manifested in

the material objects of the world. Thus the showman manipulates the facts, the particulars, in order to arrive at the meanings which the facts represent, the universals. The showman's technique is similar to Hawthorne's whose method of writing is to present facts filtered, so to speak, through a medium that will take them out of the immediate context of life and into a realm where the imagination can have full sway. He is concerned, therefore, with devices that aid the reader to maintain an illusion. But the devices do more than maintain illusion. By half obscuring the facts, they allow penetration through the mundane world to a higher truth; they help to reveal the realm of universals.

Truth, for Hawthorne, is permanent and not grounded in an external world of fact. He would certainly agree with Wellek and Warren when they say that "The reality of a work of fiction — i.e. — its illusion of reality, its effect on the reader as a convincing reading of life — is not necessarily or primarily a reality of circumstance or detail of commonplace routine. . . . Verisimilitude in detail is a means of illusion . . . which has 'truth to reality' in some deeper than circumstantial sense."<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, Hawthorne's mode of fiction illustrates his conviction that truth is not necessarily synonymous with detail. Speaking of the difference between the novel and the romance, Hawthorne says that the novel aims at "minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience". The romance "has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation", so long as it presents "the truth of the human heart" (III, p. 13).

In this way Hawthorne fixes the ontological significance of his art form. He maintains the reality of a timeless truth different from that which is immediately apparent in the world of ordinary facts. The world of facts is complicated. The essential truth for Hawthorne is the perception of human values that lie deep within the heart of man. The values are related to the facts but are beyond them. Material facts are ephemeral, but

<sup>4</sup> René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (1949), p. 220.



man's true values are timeless. I shall speak of the material objects, the facts, as the concrete and of the timeless values as the universals. Man associates certain universals with concrete situations, but the concrete situations change because of their ephemeral nature. The universals, however, do not change, so that man may associate a particular universal or a set of universals, with any number of concrete situations. In order to show the timeless qualities of the universals, Hawthorne feels free to choose any concrete situation regardless of whether it conforms to laws of probability or possibility or whether it is true to commonplace detail, as long as the universals with which it has relation do not swerve from the "truth of the human heart".

The truth of the human heart, for Hawthorne, is often buried deep, hidden or obscured by the complicated world of fact. Human activities and values are so interrelated with the world of fact and there is such interpenetration between value and fact that any narrow concept of truth would be a distortion of reality and any simple one-to-one relationship between fact and value would be a misconception. Thus Hawthorne disdains to "lay very great stress upon some definite moral purpose" at which he might aim his works. "A high truth", he says, "crowning the final development of a work of fiction . . . is never any truer, and seldom any more evident, at the last page than at the first" (III, p. 15).

Artistically, then, his purpose is to signify truth, rather than to profess it, to question the reality of appearances, and by questioning at once to cast doubt on that which is immediately apparent and to signify the timeless universal beyond the ordinary world of appearances.

The short stories which he developed are consistent with his theories. They are specifically devised to allow him to question the nature of reality. In his short stories his questioning is embodied in his technique; what he questions is embodied in his structure; and the answer to the question is inherent in total meaning. I am not here stressing distinctions between technique, structure, and meaning. Such distinctions, of course, are artificial. A particular short story exists in a unified state and is

coherent within itself. But distinctions for the purpose of analysis are helpful, and those I make here will help reveal the essential nature of Hawthorne's short stories.

My comments on the form of the stories will be limited to matters of technique and structure. Meaning is attached to a particular story and cannot be discussed apart from it. The major devices that Hawthorne uses are the symbol, the historical past, the allegorical framework of myth, and multiple perspective. By means of the symbol he is able not only to identify the concrete fact, but also by extension to suggest identification of the fact with a set of universals. The historical past and the allegorical framework are used further to extend the symbol as it expands to include the past or the framework of myth. The use of multiple perspective is an attempt to show the illusory quality of reality and the many appearances in which reality can lodge. Symbolic identification functions within the device of multiple perspective and aids in expanding the symbol. The symbol, then, in its identification and expansion actually includes the other devices, and Hawthorne's technique of questioning can be said to be generally encompassed within his use of the symbol.

Although critic after critic has praised Hawthorne's symbolic method, there are some who feel that his use of symbols is not always satisfactory. Charles Feidelson, for example, asserts that Hawthorne is one of the American symbolists, but one who is somewhat off center, most of his literary attempts being imperfectly successful. It is possible that Feidelson's statement, based as it is on a study of the novels, is inconclusive. Feidelson admits that *The Scarlet Letter* is with respect to symbolism a special case among Hawthorne's works: "Here, since the very focus of the book is a written sign, he [Hawthorne] has no difficulty in securing a symbolistic status for his material. The symbolistic method is inherent in the subject, just as the subject of symbolism is inherent in the method."<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps Feidelson finds Hawthorne to be generally unsuccessful as symbolist because the novels he examines are them-

<sup>5</sup> *Symbolism and American Literature* (1953), p. 13.



selves generally unsuccessful. In them Hawthorne does not have complete control of his technique. The symbolistic method does not insure a successful work. Success is, after all, attached to particular pieces, and a study of Hawthorne's successful short stories will show that symbolism is as inherent in method as it is in *The Scarlet Letter*.

F. O. Matthiessen regards Hawthorne as more an allegorist than a symbolist.<sup>6</sup> However, it seems to me that what Matthiessen fails to recognize is that symbols may function on the level of allegory in the same way that they may become signs. As long as the symbol remains an overextended image, as long as no attempt is made to assign to it any meaning, it remains symbol. But once meaning is attached at any level, this aspect of the symbol becomes sign. And once a group of symbols operating together is assigned meanings which form a particular pattern, conventional or otherwise, allegory emerges. Thus one set of symbols operating together to form a pattern of meaning may embody several layers of allegory; but to assign meaning and to make a symbol a sign is not to disturb the fundamental quality of the symbol. As William York Tindall says, "The symbol is not translatable. It conceals what it carries and resists total explanation."<sup>7</sup> The assigning of meaning is the work of the critic and cannot be assumed to be the fault of the symbolist author. Symbols are best left alone as the author intended them to function within the art form. But if we, in attempting to analyze technique and to derive meaning, find it necessary to pin down symbols, we must recognize that what we do is artificial and outside of the art form, and we should not burden the author with our successes or failures to make signs out of his symbols.

Hawthorne's symbol is an analogy for something unstated. Through what Tindall calls analogical embodiment Hawthorne is able to suggest identifications, thus putting into concrete terms the multiple meanings and relationships he sees. Through the use of the symbol, he is able to question; it is the means

<sup>6</sup> In *American Renaissance* (1941), pp. 249-250.

<sup>7</sup> *The Literary Symbol* (1955), p. 11.

by which he questions. The symbol that expands to include historical past or to suggest allegorical mythical framework, the multiple perspective that casts doubt at the same time that it makes identification — all of these are means of questioning.

Hawthorne asks all the essential questions, the kind that man has asked since the beginning of recorded history, the kind that have been answered only by means of ritual and myth. In his stories the classical archetypal patterns are seen: journeys, patterns of withdrawal and return. In his stories the Christian myth appears with its patterns of sin, retribution, and repentance, and variations upon the Oedipal myth clearly foreshadow Freud's descriptions of it. The questions involve the basic modes of human feeling that are deeply implanted in what we would call the subconscious and what Hawthorne would call the human heart. Thus the questions concern the universals which by their nature are timeless. The questions embodied in the symbols are the representations as events in time of the archetypal or universal.

### III

#### HAWTHORNE'S SHORT STORIES: ANALYSES OF REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

In order to illustrate the nature of Hawthorne's short stories, I shall attempt an analysis of three of his pieces — "Roger Malvin's Burial", "My Kinsman, Major Molineux", and "Young Goodman Brown". In analysis we must choose some way into the art form. The method of interpretation I use here has as a basis Freudian and archetypal patterns of recurrent thought. These are, in themselves, systems of metaphor and not direct statements of truth. When, for example, I locate symbolic configurations which suggest an Oedipal basis, I do not mean to suggest that Hawthorne understood this behavior pattern in exactly the same terms in which we today recognize and accept it. What I do mean is that Hawthorne was aware of certain universally recurrent patterns of human behavior and incorporated them into his fiction.

Nor do I mean to suggest in these analyses that I have exhausted meaning. Indeed, the nature of the symbol prohibits exhaustion of meaning. What I have done is to pin down meanings of symbols in order to show how they operate on several levels. My readings of these stories are necessarily limited; they reflect only my interpretation of the various symbols as they exist within the structural pattern of the narrative.

#### 'ROGER MALVIN'S BURIAL'

"Roger Malvin's Burial" opens with a link with the historical past. This is Hawthorne's attempt to establish point of view.

In order that he may create his illusion of reality, he provides an aura of distance which at once removes the reader from the immediate world of mundane fact and at the same time prepares him to probe with the author into the heart of the protagonist, for Reuben's guilt lies deeply hidden in his subconscious mind.

The story operates on at least three levels. There is the literal level of narration. This level deals only with external facts, which serve to mirror symbolically the substructure of imaginative truth. On another level Hawthorne tells the story in Christian terms of sin, punishment, and expiation. But Hawthorne is not content to remain with any simple one-to-one relationship with the Christian myth. Reuben sins, but what is his sin? He is punished; but what does the punishment involve? He expiates his sin; but what kind of expiation is it that involves a man's killing his only son? The third level of the story also involves guilt and expiation, but they are different in kind. Here there is subconscious guilt and subconscious expiation, and the questions involve psychological motivation. Why does Reuben feel guilty? Why at the end is he relieved of his feelings of guilt?

Every element in the story has its symbolic function. Character, plot, and scene exist on as many levels as the symbols expand within the framework of the narrative. Reuben is son, lover, father, husband; and, as his role shifts, the roles of the other characters are altered from their obvious ones in relation to him. In this way every facet of the interrelationship between members of a family is explored. The plot, too, is related to the symbolic pattern as it involves a journey out of the forest and back again. The forest is the setting of and the symbol for Reuben's subconscious drives and motives. These drives and motives originate in the forest and compel him back to the forest, where they may be released. The forest is the gigantic maze of the subconscious mind. When Reuben loses his way, he is enmeshed in his subconscious drives.

What is the sin which Reuben Bourne has committed? It is not that he left Roger Malvin in the forest to die, for Reuben had no rational choice. At the beginning of the story Reuben is

young, scarcely having attained the years of manhood. Yet he conscientiously cares for the older man, leaving him in the forest only upon his insistence. To save Roger's life is Reuben's conscious motivation. Before going, Reuben makes a vow that he will return to save Malvin's life or to lay him in the grave. In order to mark the place in the forest the boy pulls down the branch of a young oak tree and ties to it a bloodstained handkerchief that has bound his own wound, and then he leaves, hearing Malvin's prayer, a petition for Reuben's happiness and that of Dorcas.

This is the occasion that gives rise to the sin. But Reuben's departure does not constitute the sin. After being found in the woods and conveyed to his home, Reuben is unconscious for several days, while Dorcas watches over him. At the first opportunity she begins to question Reuben, but his countenance and actions make her pause. The boy speaks vehemently, defending himself, Hawthorne says, against an imaginary accusation. When Dorcas voices her assumption that her father has died, Reuben is unable to contradict her. When she asks if Reuben has dug her father's grave, Reuben answers affirmatively, lying, and thus committing the sin. He deeply regrets his lie, suffering when the townspeople praise him, and at his marriage his face is pale. The nature of the sin is pride: "pride, the fear of losing her affection, the dread of universal scorn, forbade him to rectify this falsehood" (II, p. 394). The classic sin of *hubris* is a dreadful sin and is commonly erased in classic literature by the death of the protagonist. But expiation in this story does not entail the death of Reuben; it is, rather, the death of his son.

The question to be answered is how the killing of his son could release Reuben from the sin; how is it that Reuben, a trained huntsman, hearing a noise and knowing that his son is in the vicinity, can lift his gun and shoot at a flitting shadow? How is it that, having been responsible for the death of his son, Reuben can raise his head in prayer, and how can expiation be thus complete? Answers to these questions lie in analysis of Reuben's psychological motivation. Reuben lies because he feels



guilty, but what is the actual nature of the guilt? What guilty feelings drive him to the lie?

At the beginning of the story Hawthorne suggests that the relationship between Malvin and Reuben is that of father and son. Malvin calls the boy "my son" and says that he loves Reuben "like a father". He, therefore, has "something of a father's authority" (II, p. 384). Further, Reuben is betrothed to Malvin's daughter, Dorcas. The situation here strongly parallels that of the classical Oedipal situation. If Reuben sees Malvin as a father, then he subconsciously experiences all of the antagonisms that result in his desiring the older man's death. Consequently, he feels guilty when he leaves Malvin in the forest to die. Acting out the father-son relationship with Malvin, Reuben marries his father's daughter, and his guilt feelings continue to mount. This problem can be resolved only when Reuben obliterates his own manhood, symbolized in his son.

On the two levels of the story, then, there are two levels of motivation. Overtly Reuben is guilty of the sin of pride, or *hubris*; it is for this sin that he is punished and later forgiven; but he also commits an unconscious sin, and from that sin he is released too. On the one hand, expiation is complete when he gives up that which is dearer to him than life, his son. On the other hand, relief comes to him when he symbolically accomplishes his own death. His killing of his son, then, is not completely accidental; it, too, is motivated, strongly though unconsciously. The relief which Reuben experiences at the end of the story is so strong that he feels it consciously, not knowing the full extent of his feelings.

There are, in connection with the two sins, two kinds of punishment. Retribution for the pride which makes Reuben participate in a lie consists of frustration and loss of everything which he attempts. His farm deteriorates; his irritability brings on lawsuits from his neighbors until finally he is compelled to find another place for a homesite. His unconscious sin produces a constant mental torment in which he imagines that Malvin is still living and waiting through the years for Reuben to return. Hawthorne, however, keeps the two sins separate, for Reuben



knows that his thoughts are but mental deceptions, and consciously he feels that his only sin is an unredeemed vow to return and bury Malvin's bones.

Reuben's punishment is necessary and inexorable; he knows that he has but one "remaining expedient against the evil fate that has pursued him". He must "throw sunlight into some deep recess of the forest and seek subsistence from the virgin bosom of the wilderness" (I, p. 396). He must now leave his father's home, which he has actually never left, because, in marrying Dorcas, he has received Malvin's possessions, and it is Malvin's farm which Reuben is unable to operate.

Reuben and his son go seeking another homesite, find one, and return for Dorcas and their possessions. With Dorcas now, journeying back into the forest, Reuben and Cyrus carry muskets to provide the family with food. But in their journey, as though by some compulsion, Reuben travels a different path, his steps eventually leading him to the place where he has left Malvin.

On the fateful day Reuben exhibits confusion; he appears to be reliving the past in his mind. He asks: "Where am I? Whither am I wandering? Where did I leave him?" (II, p. 400). He moves away, not conscious of his steps, more like a sleepwalker than a hunter. He is conscious that he is far off his premeditated course, and he questions his wandering, but he is unable to penetrate "to the secret place of his soul where his motives lay hidden" (II, pp. 401-402). He believes that a supernatural voice calls him, and he hopes that it is heaven's intent to afford him an opportunity to expiate his conscious sin, to allow him to find the bones of Roger Malvin, bury them, and so redeem his vow. Aroused from these thoughts by a rustling in the forest, he lifts his gun and fires. He hears a low moan and knows that he has hit his mark, but the moan goes unheeded, for now he recognizes the oak tree under which he has left Roger Malvin to die. The branch on which Reuben has tied his handkerchief is withered and dead, although the rest of the tree grows abundantly. "Whose guilt", Hawthorne asks, "had blasted it?" (II, p. 403).

Dorcas comes upon Reuben and speaks to him gaily, but after noticing his expression she comprehends the situation and hears her husband's words: "This broad rock is the gravestone of your near kindred, Dorcas. . . . Your tears will fall at once over your father and your son" (II, p. 406). Now, in this moment of tragedy, the "withered topmost bough of the oak loosened itself in the stilly air, and fell in soft, light fragments upon the rock, upon the leaves, upon Reuben, upon his wife and child, and upon Roger Malvin's bones" (II, p. 406). Reuben is now able to weep and to lift his head and pray; the sin is expiated; the curse gone.

The oak tree may be considered the largest and most powerful symbol in the story. When Reuben ties his bloodstained handkerchief around one of its branches, he ties it symbolically to the crime. Although the rest of the tree flourishes, this branch withers during Reuben's period of guilt and falls at the moment of his expiation. But, important symbolically as the oak tree is, other symbols relate to the underlying meaning of the story. The Indian war which sets the scene for the story has its own symbolic function. War involves death, a fight for survival. In a sense, the colonists have already fought one battle — with the virgin forest. They have carved from the forest their villages, the social setting for their lives. They have built their homes, and worked, and formed families. Thus the symbol expands and takes on further meaning. When identified with Reuben, this symbol expands further. Reuben has not yet built his home, nor has he formed his family. The forest through which Reuben and Malvin travel is as yet uncivilized — and so, in a sense, is Reuben at this stage in his growth. Symbolic identification may be made between the forest and Reuben's unconscious drives and motives. It is notable that the sin of pride takes place in a social setting. The punishment is social; that is, Reuben loses his earthly possessions. His unconscious motives, however, originate in the forest, away from civilization and social mores; and they compel him back to the forest where they may be released. At the end of the story, the wilderness, taking on the mysterious quality of a compulsive power, appears to

force Reuben to lose his way. The effect of the wilderness on the characters is likewise illuminating. At the beginning of the story Malvin offers Reuben advice on how to find his way from the forest; Reuben becomes enmeshed; Cyrus, the image of Reuben's untainted youth, knows his way clearly. Dorcas creates from the forest an image of civilization. With her go her almanac and her tablecloth, remnants of the society from which she has come.

"Roger Malvin's Burial" presents graphically Hawthorne's conviction that truth is an inner reality. The external facts on the literal level of narration serve to reflect the real meaning of the story, which involves the symbolism of the characters as they stand in relation to the protagonist, the psychological states of Reuben's subconscious mind, the oak tree with its withered branch, and the gigantic maze of the forest.

#### "MY KINSMAN, MAJOR MOLINEUX"

"My Kinsman, Major Molineux", like "Roger Malvin's Burial", is a graphic presentation of Hawthorne's belief that truth lies not in the external facts of appearance but beyond the facts in an inner reality. Symbols embodied in the surface level of narration question the overt appearances, and the answers to the questions can be found only in the pattern of symbolism. As in "Roger Malvin's Burial", where the surface narration serves to mirror symbolically the imaginative truth, so here the external facts involving Robin's search mirror the deeper truth. Hawthorne's purpose is to present the psychological conflict involved in the maturation of a youth. His aim is to penetrate through the exterior facts of behavior to the inner reality of the boy's consciousness. In order to do this it is necessary that Hawthorne separate the reader from the mundane world and prepare him to accept the artistic illusion. Thus he opens the story with a general account of the political climate of colonial times and in so doing he achieves distance by means of a link with the historical past. Further, he employs his usual technique ✓

of casting shadows over the events he presents. When Robin first appears on the scene, he is muffled in the dark; the only light is that of the moon and later the gleam of the lantern in his face. The darkness and the shadowy outlines serve to lend a dream-like quality to the story, thus helping to obscure the literal level of narration and to force the reader along with Hawthorne into the deeper wells of Robin's consciousness.

On the literal level of narration, Robin, his father's second son, is sent into town in order to seek the protection of his kinsman and thus to make his fortune. The youth happens into the town on a night when some of the townspeople have assumed disguises in preparation for a demonstration against one of the authorities of the king, Major Molineux, the kinsman whom the youth seeks. The boy is rebuffed by every man to whom he turns to inquire after his kinsman. Only a girl, attracted by his good looks, is friendly to him. Finally the youth is told that if he waits he will shortly see his kinsman. Later, he is joined by a gentleman, the first man who is kind to him. Together they await the boy's kinsman, who finally arrives, tarred and feathered, the object of the hooting derision of the crowds which attend. Unable to control himself, the boy joins in the raucous laughter directed at his kinsman. After the procession Robin's first thought is to retreat, to go back home, but the kindly gentleman who has attended him suggests that he wait in town for several days and that he might then decide to remain and rise in the world without the help of his kinsman.

On one level of meaning this story may be seen to have political significance. Hawthorne prefaces his account of Robin's search with a reference to the colonists of the new land who were in a state of high political excitement after they had been denied the right to appoint their own governors. Set in juxtaposition to this account of rebellion is the appearance on the scene of the boy, Robin, who also has had an appointed guardian — "It was therefore determined that Robin should profit by his kinsman's generous intentions" (III, p. 634). But Robin, being eighteen years old and well grown, and thinking it high time to begin in the world, shows the same inclination as the



colonists, who "looked with jealous scrutiny to the exercise of power which did not emanate from themselves" (III, p. 616). Robin's attempts to locate the Major are hardly serious. He forgets to ask the way of the ferryman and, remembering, does not go back, although he knows it would be wise to do so. In his search for his kinsman he goes to most unlikely places — a waterfront cafe, a street of mean appearance with ill-built houses.

The appointed governors, willing to incur the reprehension of the rulers beyond the sea by a softened and compliant attitude towards the colonists, only to incur their abuse, can be compared with the Major, an inferior member of the court party, who suffered the same fate as the governors. The Major is described sympathetically as a man of steady soul, a large and majestic person with a head grown gray in honor. The climax of the story combines these two parallels, when the colonists in a rebellious and violent episode tar and feather the Major and when Robin joins in the senseless uproar, the frenzied merriment, in trampling on an old man's heart.

If a meaning is to be drawn from this story concerning Hawthorne's evaluation of the political conditions of colonial times, it must be concluded that he considered the colonists at this time to be hardly fit for the exercise of self-government, since their behavior is unprincipled and violent. "On they went", Hawthorn says, "like fiends that throng in mockery around some dead potentate. . . . On they went in counterfeited pomp, in senseless uproar" (III, p. 640). Furthermore, through analogy with Robin, the colonists are revealed as being inept, insecure, and unready for self regulation. Although Robin describes himself as a shrewd youth, he shows little shrewdness in his dealings with the townspeople. He is the country boy who is, by turns, ill at ease and suspicious. His inability to make his own way, and, by analogy, the colonists' unreadiness to govern themselves are shown by Robin's ready acceptance of another guardian, the kindly gentleman, who, at the end of the story, directs and controls Robin's behavior.

On this level of meaning symbolic identification is made



between Robin's confusions and wanderings through the maze of the town in the dark of the night and the bizarre guise and actions of the townspeople, who are, as in the past, preparing violent means to set against authority. Robin's appearance and actions, then, comment upon the appearance and actions of the townspeople, and the allegory may be read in terms of Robin's behavior. But, if Robin's behavior can be identified with the behavior of the townspeople, it is also clear that the appearance and actions of the townspeople are a mirror which reflects the internal feelings of Robin. This objectification of internal feelings is even more manifest in the apparent dream structure which Hawthorne provides. The first appreciation of this structure comes from the effect of the story itself. Although it is related in a realistic manner, the realism is not of everyday life but of the fantastic rationale of a dream. Peopled with bizarre characters who behave in inexplicable ways and with a protagonist whose search and unaccountable behavior at the climax make a rational interpretation difficult, the story bears a closer resemblance to dream activity than to the normal activity of the everyday world. The circumstances of Robin's search and the search itself make up a typical dream pattern of isolation and rejection. The crossing of the river in the moonlight is highly suggestive of the passage from consciousness to sleep. The boy's movements up and down the streets of the city, the apparent inconsistencies and incongruities in the appearances of the people he meets and the situations he finds, the use of light and dark, the tonal effects — the tapping of the cane, the sounds of voices, the tinkling of bells, the laughter — all combine to create the aura of the dream. Hawthorne's use of a typical dream structure provides him with a means to objectify psychological states. Within such a dream structure each incident and character become a symbolic representation of the youth's inner conflict. The dream, then, can be taken as a reflection of Robin's feelings and a revelation of their source.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the dream structure see Franklin B. Newman, "'My Kinsman, Major Molineux', An Interpretation", *University of Kansas City Review*, XXI (March, 1955), pp. 203-212.

The most important symbol in operation at the beginning of the story is the cudgel which Robin carries under his left arm. This cudgel has been formed of an oak sapling and retains part of the sapling's hardened root. The sapling is strong, but hardly full grown and, significantly, it retains part of its root. Symbolic identification of Robin with the sapling is immediate. It is apparent that Robin has not yet severed his ties with his family.

Robin's feelings concerning his quest are exceedingly complex because they involve not only his need to retain dependency, but also his need to free himself from parental authority. These opposing needs create conflict so that he is alternately aggressive and dependent in his relation to others. This alternating pattern of behavior is apparent in the opening pages of the story, where Robin, unable to locate his kinsman, finds himself lost in a succession of streets whose contours suggest a maze which represents the boy's confusion and conflict.

With a light step and an eager eye, Robin begins his search for his kinsman, but before long he realizes that he does not know where he is going nor the way. Soon he sees a man walking ahead of him on the street. On overtaking the elderly gentleman, Robin takes hold of the old man's coat and retains his hold upon it while he asks in a loud voice the whereabouts of the dwelling of his kinsman. Robin's voice is so loud that it brings barbers from their shops into the street. This imagery of Robin's clinging to a man's coat suggests the behavior of a boisterous child, and, indeed, the stranger reacts with excessive anger and annoyance. The man, who carries a long and polished cane in contrast to Robin's crude cudgel, rebukes the boy and threatens him with punishment. Robin, then, releases the garment and hurries away, pursued, Hawthorne says, by the laughter of the by-standers.

Robin is surprised by the response he has received. He concludes that the man lacks civility and assures himself that he will soon become wiser in seeking directions. However, as soon as he comes to this conclusion, he becomes entangled in a succession of crooked and narrow streets which cross each other. Symbolically, Robin, desiring independence, also fears it, and

thus thoughts of his eventual wisdom and independence cause him to involve himself in a maze.

A recurrent situation is now apparent: Robin asks directions of a man in authority, is rebuked and turned away to the accompaniment of laughter, and consequently finds himself lost in a succession of streets. This action is repeated three times in the opening pages of the story. Having fled from the man with the polished cane and wandered through darkened streets, Robin, realizing that he is hungry, sees an inn and approaches it. He laments his lack of money to purchase food, but he comforts himself with the thought that the Major will feed him. He then steps inside the inn. Of all the occupants of the inn Robin's sympathies are drawn to a group of sheepish countrymen, but he does not draw near them, and, exerting what would appear to be control over child-like impulses, he turns his attention to a man who stands near the door. The man's visage makes a deep impression on Robin, who stands deliberating as to whom to ask concerning his kinsman's dwelling. Robin is saved from having to make a decision by the inn-keeper, who is the second figure of authority to whom Robin directs his inquiry. As in the first situation, where the imagery reveals Robin as a child, so here his rationalizations reveal his immaturity. He believes that the initial civility of the inn-keeper is due to a familial resemblance between the youth and the Major. The boy speaks to the inn-keeper with an assumption of confidence which he feels befits the Major's relative, and he interprets a general movement in the room as eagerness to lead him to his kinsman. When the inn-keeper threatens him with jail, Robin begins to draw his hand toward the lighter end of his cudgel but thinks better of using it when he recognizes a strange hostility in every face around him. Again the boy flees, pursued by the laughter of the people in the inn. He turns the corner and again finds himself lost, this time not in darkened streets but in a well-lighted thoroughfare among promenading people. Not willing to inquire again in so public a place, Robin determines to thrust his face close to every elderly gentleman's in search of the features of his kinsman. The boy meets with "some rebukes for

the impertinence of his scrutiny" (III, p. 624). His actions are halted, however, when he hears the tapping of the cane which belongs to the first man he has met. Frightened, he again flees.

Now he finds himself in a street of mean appearance, where a girl in a doorway is discernible to his eye. When he asks her about his kinsman, his voice is plaintive and winning. Robin doubts the truth of the girl's statement that the Major dwells in the meanly constructed house by which the youth stands, yet he allows the girl to draw him half-way inside the door. She is interrupted, however, by the sound of an opening door and she retreats, leaving Robin outside.

Now a watchman carrying a lantern and a long, spiked staff appears, and he threatens Robin with the stocks. The staff of the watchman can be compared with Robin's cudgel and also with the long polished cane carried by the first figure of authority. Both the staff and the cane are easily wielded and signify a sharpness and an urbanity which are in marked contrast to the crudeness of Robin's cudgel. Robin feels "an instinctive antipathy" toward "this guardian of midnight order" (III, p. 627). Here, of course, is the third figure of authority whom Robin questions. This time the boy shouts his question after the watchman, who makes no reply. Rather, he turns the corner and disappears, but Robin hears in his wake the sound of laughter.

Robin roams desperately, and at random, through the town. Twice he meets parties of men among whom are individuals in outlandish attire. They speak to him in an unfamiliar language but curse him in plain English. This symbolic inability to communicate with other men is important, for it serves to demonstrate Robin's isolation. In fact, he cannot speak their language.

Finally the youth determines to knock at the door of every mansion that might appear worthy to house his kinsman. When he is firm in this resolve he meets a bulky stranger muffled in a cloak. Flourishing the cudgel in front of the man's face, Robin demands to know the whereabouts of his kinsman. The stranger steps into the moonlight and unmuffles his face, at the same time telling Robin to watch in an hour for his kinsman to pass.



The face is that of the man in the inn, but now it shows a change. One side is red, the other black. His mouth, "which seemed to extend from ear to ear was black or red, in contrast to the color of the cheek". The effect, Hawthorne says, is of "two individual devils, a fiend of fire and a fiend of darkness" (III, p. 628). The stranger, of course, is the leader of the rebel forces, another figure of authority, but this time he wears the mask of a devil; and, significantly, he tells Robin how to find his kinsman. Shrouded in ambiguity, the masked figure represents the ambivalence of the boy's feelings.

Now Robin sits beside a church door to wait for his kinsman. A dull dream-sound composed of many noises intrudes upon his consciousness. The sound is sleep-inspiring, so to fight off his drowsiness, Robin climbs a window frame to peer into the interior of the church. A strong sensation of loneliness overcomes him, and he turns away. He sights graves around the church and wonders if the kinsman he seeks is mouldering in a shroud. Such thoughts lead him to longing for a companion and to thinking of his own home, visualizing his family at evening prayer. He watches their actions and sees them go in the door. When he tries to follow, the latch tinkles into place, excluding him from his home. An important focal point in the story, this episode reveals the essential motivation for Robin's behavior.

It is clear that the figures of authority whom Robin meets reflect his feelings for his father, the first authority, and that these feelings are essentially hostile. In the story the situations involving the father-figure are all variations on one pattern. The father rejects the son, and the son, seeking to establish his own identity, is ridiculed by male by-standers. These circumstances are repeated until the kinsman with whom the boy seeks to make identity and so establish his own ego-ideal is shown ridiculed by the attending crowds. Robin's anger and hostility toward the father who has rejected him are expressed symbolically in the tarring and feathering of another father, Major Molineux. As on the level of political allegory, so here the tarring and feathering of the Major serves as the climactic episode.



"As if a dream had broken forth from some feverish brain", Robin sees a single horseman with the fierce, variegated face of the infernal stranger (III, p. 638). A command from the horseman halts the procession, and at last Robin's search is over. In the din created by the jeers of the townspeople, Robin comes face to face with his kinsman. Then, seized by the spirit of the crowd, Robin joins in ridiculing the Major, and Robin's laugh is the loudest of all. His hostility is thus released and realized, and his laugh is a signal to the leader to resume the march of the procession. The tumult dies down, and the streets are left clear and silent.

The townspeople have acted out in violence the anger Robin subconsciously harbored; simultaneously, Robin's strivings toward self-identity are destroyed, as he joins in the mockery. Assuming the responsibility and blame, in guilt and defeat, Robin says to the kindly gentleman beside him, "Thanks to you and to my other friends, I have at last met my kinsman, and he will scarce desire to see my face again. I begin to grow weary of a town life, sir. Will you show me the way to the ferry?" (III, 641). In this way he abandons his initial quest for identity and submits instead to the control of another guardian, the kindly gentleman, the embodiment of the perfect father image.

"My Kinsman, Major Molineux" is a study in conflict — political, social, and personal. The political conflict presents Robin as colonist who has need to control his childish impulses toward violence; the social conflict involves Robin's need to attain maturity and his concomitant need to retain dependency; his personal conflict concerns his subconscious impulses deriving from hostility to the father. Thus, character, plot, and scene relate levels of meaning, and the structure of symbolism mirrors the inner truths.

#### "YOUNG GOODMAN BROWN"

In "Young Goodman Brown", Hawthorne again questions the nature of appearance and reality. Again symbols identify ap-

pearances, and as they identify they question the function of the appearances within the total situation. And again answers to the questions come only through examination of the total configuration of the symbols.

As do the protagonists in "Roger Malvin's Burial" and "My Kinsman, Major Molineux", young Goodman Brown makes a journey which is set in terms that reflect an inner reality. His movement from the village to the forest and back again to the village suggests a frequently encountered pattern of death and rebirth, especially since the village is associated with day and the forest with night, and through extension of the symbols, the day with good and the night with evil. Young Goodman Brown journeys through the forest and out again, yet it would appear that for him there is no rebirth. In terms of the story Brown seems to be the only person in the village who resists the devil and refuses baptism into sin; yet he lives a life of shadowy gloom. One of the major questions that Hawthorne poses concerns this apparent contradiction:

Had Goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch meeting?

Be it so if you will; but, alas! it was a dream of evil omen for young Goodman Brown. A stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man did he become from the night of that fearful dream. (II, pp. 105-106)

Hawthorne seems to suggest that whether Brown's experience in the night is an actual occurrence or not is immaterial. The effect of the experience is real enough, and it is with the effect of this reality on young Goodman Brown that we are to be concerned. Therefore, Brown's experience in the night comes to be for him the reality, while the day and town reflect only a world of appearances. The world of the day and the town is but a temporal manifestation of the unchanging reality of the night-time experience, whether or not it be called a dream.

The identification and extension of symbol is the major technique which Hawthorne employs in the presentation of the story. Its use results in a perversion of the Christian myth in terms of which the story is ostensibly set. Within the Christian

myth, symbols expand to form an intricate network of correspondences. The devil becomes not only Lucifer, the traditional tempter and seducer of mankind, but he is also God the Father and Christ the Son and, in Christian typology, Moses, the leader of his people. The rod he carries is not only the devil's staff and the embodiment of evil in the form of a serpent, but it is also by extension Moses' rod with its serpent entwined, and a symbol of Christ — "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots: and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him."<sup>2</sup> Within Christian mythology, and by means of the network of correspondences which form it, the rod can also be seen as a portion of the Tree of Knowledge that came out of the Garden of Eden and later became the cross upon which Christ was crucified and, therefore, the Tree of Salvation, by which means mankind was saved.<sup>3</sup> Within this symbolic cluster, Brown becomes not only Adam, who ate of the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden, but also Christ in the Wilderness, and the symbolic bridegroom of the Church. Faith is the bride, and by means of her mother-role in the story, she can be seen also as the Holy Virgin, mother of Christ. The network of correspondences which I have outlined here exists in the Christian myth. Hawthorne sets his story in the framework of this myth and uses the symbols which are in operation in it. In so doing he makes use of the set of identifications which is the basis of Christian mythology.

On another level symbols operate on a different value scheme. If Brown's journey is taken as a process of maturation by which he attempts to locate and gain knowledge of the real world, then symbols within the story take on added meaning and give the story greater significance. Brown can be considered as a child who refuses to accept responsibility for his actions, who wishes to experiment with evil but afterwards to withdraw and be protected by his wife-mother, Faith. The story can then be read in terms of Brown's inability to mature and to accept the

<sup>2</sup> *Isaiah* II : 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> For a more complete discussion of this system of correspondences see Alan W. Watts, *Myth and Ritual in Christianity* (1960), pp. 85-114.

conditions of life. This inability to mature can be understood further in terms of the Oedipal pattern for within this story is clearly stated a reenactment of this conflict, the primitive drama of love and hate involving child and parents. The actors in the story all represent the people in the triangle — father, mother, and child.

"Young Goodman Brown" opens at sunset in the village of Salem. The first sentence of the story sets time and place; thus Hawthorne makes use of the historical perspective and at once indicates the shadows soon to fall as the sun sets. The psychic distance which he thus achieves is immediate, and it takes only statements expediently placed to maintain the distance that he sets up. "Goodman", of course, is a term of address, but as used in this story, it takes on allegorical significance and serves to universalize the protagonist, who becomes not only an Everyman, but also a good man, a value judgment to be replaced by questionings as to the nature of good and evil. The common name, Brown, adds to the Everyman significance of the protagonist. The allegorical significance of the name "Faith" is obvious, and the initial terms of the story are set. A good young man is married to faith. The pink ribbons which Hawthorne so much emphasizes in the opening lines of the story appear to represent youthful innocence. It does not appear that the ribbons ever take on additional significance. Rather, because they retain a one-to-one correspondence, they become a means of control. Faith loses one ribbon which her husband finds. But, it is only one ribbon, and she wears pink ribbons when she greets her husband on his return from his night's journey. It would appear, then, that Faith retains her ties with innocence, even though her husband's actions indicate his belief that she has partaken of the baptism. Whether Faith has actually received the baptism is ambiguous. Yet it would seem that Hawthorne suggests her participation in these rites since she returns from the night's journey able to live without the doubts that plague her husband, who, we know, refuses the baptism.

The beginning of the story makes clear that Faith as well as Goodman Brown has made an appointment with the devil for



the midnight meeting. Her entreaties to her husband indicate her reluctance to be left alone and consequently her unwillingness to keep her appointment. The child approaching maturity often resists meeting and accepting problems and responsibilities. Faith is afraid and hesitates, as her husband does, to accept the mark of baptism, but the experience, real or unreal, does not have the same effect on her that it has on her husband. Her attitude toward life is joyful and accepting, his a bitter withdrawal from his wife and the life of the village.

Brown's views concerning his wife reflect his essential immaturity. It is clear that it does not occur to him that Faith may have been called to the midnight meeting. He does consider that she may have been warned through a dream as to where he is going, but he rejects this thought immediately. He calls Faith "a blessed angel on earth", and promises that after this one excursion into sin he will "cling to her skirts and follow her to heaven" (II, p. 90). The notion of clinging to her skirts is suggestive of the actions of a child who desires the protection of his mother. Thus, here, Brown feels that he will be carried to heaven by Faith. It would appear that Brown's faith is child-like and unquestioning and is in no way based upon a knowledge of the real world.

The introduction of the devil figure, besides setting the story in terms of the Christian myth, also completes the triangle of figures in the Oedipal situation. The scene is set in a forest which must be penetrated; and, as the journey progresses, the sexual characteristics of the situation become more manifest. On the journey through the forest young Goodman Brown is accompanied by the devil, who looks remarkably like him. "They might have been taken for father and son", Hawthorne says (II, p. 91). The devil figure is commonly symbolic of the father, and the serpent is a traditional phallic symbol of the father. In this situation the devil attempts to seduce the son into what the son considers to be evil — a recognition of his own sexuality. The son, here, calls on Faith, the mother, repeatedly to save him from the devil, his image of the father. By thus calling upon the mother, Brown reveals his childish fantasy of



virgin birth, which denies the sexual role of the father. In devil lore the name of the Virgin Mary is considered to be a most powerful weapon against the devil. The identification of Faith with the Virgin Mary occurs not only on this level of interpretation but also on the level of Christian myth, where she acts as wife-mother in relation to Christ as son.

In the complicated system of related symbols in the Christian myth, the devil is associated with God, the father, since in the myth one cannot exist without the other.<sup>4</sup> The devil is but a manifestation of darkness without which the light would not be visible. Since the relationship of father-son has already been set up, young Goodman Brown, then, by extension, functions as the son of God. Since Christ is the Bridegroom of the Church, Brown's wife, Faith, is then symbolically identified with the Church. Within Christian mythology the Church is identified with the Holy Mother. Symbols thus extend to include a complex notion of the nature of good and evil.

During the journey with the devil young Goodman Brown speaks often of his reluctance to go on. It is noteworthy, however, that although he expresses a desire to leave the forest, he continues his journey. The devil makes clear to Goodman Brown that many others before him have traveled the path to the midnight meeting. Slowly, but directly, the devil destroys the illusions that Brown maintains concerning the innocence of his relatives and friends. The most important reason that Brown advances to prove that he should not continue the journey concerns his wife. It would, he says, "break her dear little heart". The devil replies, "Nay, if that be the case . . . e'en go thy ways, Goodman Brown. I would not for twenty old women like the one hobbling before us that Faith should come to any harm" (II, p. 93). And, significantly, Faith does not come to any harm.

The appearance of Goody Cloyse in the guise of a witch seems to force from Brown's mind his decision to stop the journey. The devil and Brown walk on. The devil exhorts his companion to make good speed and persevere, "discoursing so aptly that his arguments seemed rather to spring up in the bosom of

<sup>4</sup> See Watts, pp. 57-84.

his auditor than to be suggested by himself" (II, p. 95). Before long, however, Brown announces that his mind is made up. He will not budge another step. The devil accepts this quietly, saying that Brown will think better by and by. Leaving a staff, which he has fashioned from a maple stick, to help Brown along, the devil disappears into the deepening gloom.

This seduction scene is reminiscent of Milton's description in *Paradise Lost* of the seduction of Eve in the Garden by Lucifer in the guise of a serpent. Certainly, Hawthorne's emphasis on the rod of the devil, which has the appearance of a wriggling snake, is meant to suggest Satan in the Garden and has reference to both *Paradise Lost* and the seduction scene in the Bible. The seduction scene also has overtones of the temptation by Satan of Christ in the Wilderness. Like Christ, Brown ultimately refuses to yield to the guile of the devil. But the allegorical relationship is reversed, for Christ is victorious, but Brown doomed. The forty days that Christ spent in the Wilderness are associated in Christian doctrine with the period of Lent before the rebirth of Christ. In Christian terms rebirth is associated with baptism. Here, of course, the baptism is into sin, but it is not completely out of line with the terms of the myth because Christ had to descend into Hades before he was able to emerge victorious. The symbolic implications in the story are clear. Evil is a necessary part of good. "Good and evil are relative to one another. Without evil good cannot be recognized."<sup>5</sup>

All the symbols on this level of interpretation point to this conclusion. They all reflect elements of both good and evil. Besides the ones that have already been mentioned others are noteworthy. Goody Cloyse, Deacon Gookin, and the minister are paragons of virtue in the town of Salem. Their midnight visit does not negate the good they accomplish, albeit young Goodman Brown can recognize only their evil. The situations recounted by the devil to Brown concerning the evil practices of Brown's kinsmen are evil only relatively. The motivation for their actions sprang from what they considered to be good. At the baptismal service are the respectable as well as the dis-

<sup>5</sup> Watts, p. 72.

reputable people of the town. Brown's problem is that he is unable to accept evil as a necessary function of the good. "A truly problematic evil arises in human life when the necessary dark side of existence is not accepted and 'loved' along with the light. . . . Devilish behavior is the necessary consequence of not coming to terms with Lucifer, of refusing to admit that life is willy-nilly a coincidence of opposites."<sup>6</sup> Unable to accept the evil with the good, Brown can see only the evil, and this becomes his reality.

On the level of psychological reality the story may be seen in different and yet closely related terms. The events of Brown's experience become symbolic representations of his inner consciousness. The devil, the representative of evil in man, is a creation of the mind of Brown within the night-time experience. In Freudian terms a belief in the devil represents "an exteriorization of two sets of repressed wishes, both of which are ultimately derived from the infantile Oedipus situation".<sup>7</sup> The first is the wish to imitate certain attributes of the father; the second, the wish to defy the father. There is, in other words, "an alternating emulation of and hostility against the father".<sup>8</sup> The primary source of the boy's envy relates to his father's sexual potency, and in devil lore the close association of the serpent with the devil is a symbolic representation of his sexuality.<sup>9</sup> Another characteristic of the devil is his close association with nature, the personification of the mother, and particularly with the hidden parts of nature. The devil characteristically dwells in remote places, being especially fond of dark forests.<sup>10</sup> The devil receives not only the envy of the son, but also his hostility. The son sees the father not only as tempter and seducer, but as pursuer, as enemy. Thus, young Goodman Brown is seduced into the forest, but while there his reactions are essentially hostile. In normal growth, however, a day of reconciliation comes when the child not only accepts the sexuality of his

<sup>6</sup> Watts, p. 72.

<sup>7</sup> Ernest Jones, *On the Nightmare* (1959), p. 155.

<sup>8</sup> Jones, p. 155.

<sup>9</sup> Jones, p. 169.

<sup>10</sup> Jones, p. 173.

parents but is able to free himself of his hostility for his father, resolving the conflict by incorporating the image of the father with his own self-image. Young Goodman Brown, however, never reaches this reconciliation. At the altar he is still noncompliant; his main conflict is still unresolved; and he calls upon Faith, the mother figure, to resist the devil. Unable to resolve his conflict, Brown lives apart from the main stream of life, renouncing, as he does, one of its most vital forces. Since he is unable to allow existence for other people as they are and not as he feels they should be, his own existence, as well as his dying hour, is gloom.

#### IV

### THE LITERARY THEORY OF REPRESENTATIVE MODERN SHORT STORY WRITERS

A remarkable similarity exists between Hawthorne's literary theory and that of a representative group of modern short story writers. In the famous essay, "The Condition of Art", which was published as a preface to *Nigger of the Narcissus*, Joseph Conrad set down elements of an esthetic which show that he, like Hawthorne, was concerned with lasting truths:

... art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect. It is an attempt to find in its forms, in its colors, in its light, in its shadows, in the aspects of matter and in the facts of life, what of each is fundamental, what is enduring and essential — their one illuminating and convincing quality — the very truth of their existence.<sup>1</sup>

The artist, Conrad says, like the thinker and the scientist, seeks truth, but whereas the thinker and the scientist appeal to man's reason, to his common sense, to his credulity, the artist's appeal is made "to that part of our nature which, because of the warlike conditions of existence, is necessarily kept out of sight within the more resisting and hard qualities — like the vulnerable body within a steel armor".<sup>2</sup> The appeal of the artist is less loud but more profound, less distinct but more stirring; and its effect, Conrad says, endures forever.

Likewise similar to Hawthorne's is Conrad's statement of the aim of fiction:

<sup>1</sup> *The Indispensable Conrad*, ed. Morton Dauwen Zabel (1951), p. 705. Hereafter cited as Conrad.

<sup>2</sup> Conrad, p. 706.



[The artist] speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation — to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts, to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity — the dead to the living, and the living to the unborn.<sup>3</sup>

Such is the aim, and when it is accomplished — “behold! — all the truth of life is there”.<sup>4</sup>

In a letter Conrad reveals his cognizance that events must be treated as only illustrative of “human sensation, — as the outward sign of human feelings”. “Imagination should be used”, he states, “to create human souls: to disclose human hearts.”<sup>5</sup> The similarity of Conrad’s esthetic to Hawthorne’s is again evident in a statement concerning the final meaning of the art object. Conrad says: “I wish at first to put before you a general proposition that a work of art is very seldom limited to one exclusive meaning and not necessarily tending to definite conclusion. And this for the reason that the nearer it approaches art, the more it acquires a symbolic character.”<sup>6</sup> These statements indicate not only Conrad’s desire to get at a truth which is not to be found in outward events but also suggest his problem of how to get at this truth, a problem solved by use of the symbol, which brings to the art work complexity, power, depth, and beauty. “The symbolic conception of a work of art has this advantage, that it makes a triple appeal covering the whole field of life.”<sup>7</sup>

Throughout her writing career, Katherine Mansfield, like Conrad, was concerned with the understanding of the principles of composition. It is possible to glean from her journal and reviews some idea of her gropings toward a consistent esthetic and through a study of her method to generalize con-

<sup>3</sup> Conrad, p. 706.

<sup>4</sup> Conrad, p. 710.

<sup>5</sup> Conrad, pp. 731-732.

<sup>6</sup> Conrad, p. 749.

<sup>7</sup> Conrad, p. 749.

cerning her philosophy of art. Mansfield believes that the author is the medium through which truth gleams. "Lord", she says in her journal, "make me crystal clear for the light to shine through."<sup>8</sup> The business of the author is a serious affair. "The great writers of the past have not been 'entertainers.' They have been seekers, explorers, thinkers. It has been their aim to reveal a little of the mystery of life." The writer must escape from surface impressions. "Is it not the great abiding satisfaction of a work of art that the writer was master of the situation when he wrote it and at the mercy of nothing less mysterious than a greater work of art?"<sup>9</sup> The author must penetrate beyond surface impressions to reveal a deeper truth. Through the great complex of events and surface data the writer seeks new forms "in which to express something more subtle, more complex, 'nearer' the truth". The facts of reality are binding. "The citizens of Reality are 'tied to town' and very content to be so tied, very thankful to look out of the window on to a good substantial wall, plastered over with useful facts and topped with a generous sprinkle of broken glass bottles." But truth lies outside these walls, and the writer must not be content with the "timid flight just half-way to somewhere, just so far that Reality and its wall is out of sight, for such a journey distracts, but does not disturb".<sup>10</sup>

It is necessary that the author set down things in such a way that the relation of things becomes apparent, because event in itself does not constitute truth. Mansfield is highly critical of "certain modern authors" to whom event as event constitutes recognition and embodies the whole of the creative act. These writers "instead of going any further, instead of attempting to relate their 'experiences' to life or to see them against any kind of background" are "content to remain in the air, hovering over, as if the thrilling moment were enough and more than enough".<sup>11</sup> The writer through the structure of his writings must make clear

<sup>8</sup> *Journal of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. J. Middleton Murry (1946), p. 201.

<sup>9</sup> *Novels and Novelists*, ed. J. Middleton Murry (1930), pp. 44-45.

<sup>10</sup> *Novels and Novelists*, p. 96.

<sup>11</sup> *Novels and Novelists*, p. 143.

the pattern of these relationships. Every part of the story must make clear the relation of part to whole. The art of writing is not a haphazard affair of setting down an impression, but it is rather a studied attempt to penetrate beyond impressions in order to mirror the relation of things, where the structure of the story reflects the truth. "Then, indeed, as in the stories of Tchekhov, we should become aware of the rain pattering on the roof all night long, of the languid feverish wind, of the moonlit orchard and the first snow, passionately realized, not indeed as analogous to a state of mind, but as linking the mind to the larger whole."<sup>12</sup>

Like Mansfield, D. H. Lawrence also saw as basic an understanding of relationships. William York Tindall places Lawrence in the romantic tradition:

In the war between Imagination and science, poetry and fact, feeling and thinking, Lawrence took his stand not only with Coleridge but with Blake and Baudelaire. "The two ways of knowing," he said in what might be the manifesto of the romantic movement, "are knowing in ways of apartness, which is mental, rational, and scientific, and knowing in terms of togetherness, which is religious and poetic." Only through the creative unconscious, he believed, can the dead universe of fact come alive again.<sup>13</sup>

Like Mansfield also, Lawrence did not write a clear statement of his philosophy of art, although there are relevant comments scattered through many of his essays and criticisms. These comments, however, are sometimes complicated by his habit of using a poetic language to express a discursive thought. In writing of the truth which art conveys, for example, Lawrence says, "Art-speech is the only truth. An artist is usually a damned liar, but his art, if it be art, will tell you the truth of his day. And that is all that matters. Away with eternal truth."<sup>14</sup> Here are two problems brought about by Lawrence's use of language. In one instance he writes of "the only truth", as though it were an ab-

<sup>12</sup> *Novels and Novelists*, p. 54.

<sup>13</sup> *The Later D. H. Lawrence*, selected with introductions by William York Tindall (1952), p. vii.

<sup>14</sup> *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923), p. 2.

solute, but later he banishes the notion of eternal truth. Further, he seems to make a distinction between the truth which the artist sets out to convey and the truth which he does convey, saying:

The curious thing about art-speech is that it prevaricates so terribly, I mean it tells such lies. . . . And out of a pattern of lies art weaves truth. . . . The artist sets out to point a moral and adorn a tale. The tale, however, points the other way, as a rule. Two blankly opposing morals, the artist's and the tale's. Never trust the artist. Trust the tale.<sup>15</sup>

Although Lawrence seems to eschew the idea of truth as an absolute, still, he does maintain the constancy of relationships. "Everything in the world is relative to everything else. And every living thing is related to every other living thing."<sup>16</sup> Thus, in effect, he takes the same position regarding the existence of poetic truth as that taken by Hawthorne with his "truth of the human heart", Conrad with his "truth of life", and Mansfield with her truth of the relationship of each experience to the whole of life. Further, like these writers, Lawrence sees this truth expressed through art, not, however, through what the artist means to convey, but, rather, through what he does convey. Thus, like the others, Lawrence makes primary the art form itself. The exterior events of the story Lawrence sees as subterfuge, whereas what lies under the exterior events is truth. It is, therefore, not surprising to find Lawrence recognizing the value of the symbol as a means of expressing truth. In a letter he writes that "all art is *au fond* symbolic, conscious or unconscious".<sup>17</sup> The truth which the symbol expresses, however, cannot be stated discursively. "The true symbol", Lawrence states, "defies all explanations." "Fix the meaning of a symbol, and you have fallen into the commonplace of allegory."<sup>18</sup> The meaning of a symbol, then, cannot be fixed, but it can, certainly, be explored, a task Lawrence set himself in a great deal of

<sup>15</sup> *Studies in Classic American Literature*, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> "Aristocracy", *The Later D. H. Lawrence*, p. 222.

<sup>17</sup> *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, n.d., p. 832.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in *The Later D. H. Lawrence*, p. xii.

his criticism<sup>19</sup> where, for example, he explores the symbolic meaning which he feels lies beneath the surface level of narration in the works of such writers as Hawthorne and Poe.<sup>20</sup>

Although William Faulkner has written little of an autobiographical or critical nature, his view of the artist and of the purpose of fiction can be found in scattered observations through various interviews and in his often-quoted Nobel Prize speech. The writer, Faulkner believes, must be concerned with the problems of the "human heart in conflict with itself". Only this conflict is worth writing about. There is no room in the writer's workshop "for anything but the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed — love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice".<sup>21</sup> Until the writer speaks of these things, "he writes not of the heart but of the glands".<sup>22</sup> This truth of the heart is primary. Fact is not important "because it can be altered by law, by circumstance . . . but truth is the constant thing".<sup>23</sup>

Faulkner, then, makes a case for the universal verities against the mundane facts of existence and states that "it is the poet's, the writer's duty" to write of these things. But man, of course, lives in a factual world. It is the author's duty, then, to penetrate through facts in order to reach that realm in which truth lies. The fact that Faulkner's early writings are obviously experimental in technique attests his conscious concern to find a medium of expression which could most effectively reveal the conflict of the heart. The careful working out of plot structure combined with an intricately detailed stream of consciousness show an author acquainted with the problems of communication through the art form. The truth which he desires to present is ever-present, immediately experienceable, and, in a sense, all comprehensive. In his writings there is merging of past and present time in an attempt to reflect an ever-present reality. He

<sup>19</sup> *The Later D. H. Lawrence*, p. xi.

<sup>20</sup> *The Later D. H. Lawrence*, p. xi.

<sup>21</sup> *The English Novel* (1953), pp. 247-248.

<sup>22</sup> The Nobel Prize Speech, delivered in Stockholm, December 10, 1950.

<sup>23</sup> *Faulkner at Nagano*, ed. Robert A. Jellife (1956), p. 101.



accomplishes this merging of time by the use of several devices: the constantly shifting point of view, counterpoint, or the simultaneous running of two or more plot structures, and the personal style which has come to be known as the Faulknerian idiom and which by its own complexity and intensity mirrors the reality he means to convey. With all these devices he creates a symbolic story where the juxtaposition of past and present reveals a myth of the saga of man. Perhaps the entire symbolic method is summed up in a statement Faulkner made in an interview: "It's best to take the gesture, the shadow of the branch, and let the mind create the tree."<sup>24</sup> Like Hawthorne, Faulkner needs his reader's participation in the symbolic creation. He, therefore, calls upon a reservoir of primordial responses which the reader brings to the art form. "What symbolism is in the books", Faulkner says, "is evidently instinct in man, not in man's knowledge but in his inheritance of his old dreams, in his blood, perhaps his bone, rather than in the storehouse of his memory."<sup>25</sup>

Ernest Hemingway has incorporated into *Green Hills of Africa* and *Death in the Afternoon* many passages pertinent to a discussion of his philosophy of composition. C. Hugh Holman has already outlined characteristics of Hemingway's philosophy which place him in the group which I have been discussing.<sup>26</sup> Hemingway, like Hawthorne and the others, seeks truth through his writings. The artist is a seer who must penetrate the irrelevancies of factual material in order to present the real meaning behind the facts. The burden falls on the presentation of truth through art, for art is the microcosmic representation of the macrocosm which is the universe.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, the artist must select the facts which reveal the truth:

I was trying to write then and I found the greatest difficulty, aside from knowing truly what you really felt, rather than what you were supposed to feel, and had been taught to feel, was to put down

<sup>24</sup> Nagano, p. 72.

<sup>25</sup> Nagano, p. 68.

<sup>26</sup> "Hemingway and Emerson", *Modern Fiction Studies*, I, 3 (August, 1955), pp. 12-19.

<sup>27</sup> Holman, p. 14.

what really happened in action; what the actual things were which produced the emotion that you experienced. In writing for a newspaper you told what happened and, with one trick and another, you communicated the emotion aided by the element of timeliness which gives a certain emotion to any account of something that has happened on that day; but the real thing, the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion and which would be as valid in a year or in ten years or, with luck and if you stated it purely enough, always, was beyond me and I was working very hard to try to get it.<sup>28</sup>

The emphasis on presenting *what really happened* as opposed to *what happened* is crucial here. *What happened* is an account of the facts, whereas *what really happened* is an account of the truth beneath the facts. In this way the artist can tell truth "truer . . . than anything factual can be".<sup>29</sup> The selection of the facts which convey the truth, then, takes on maximum importance. "If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water."<sup>30</sup> This kind of writing makes vital reader participation, and it is in this kind of writing that the symbol takes on maximum importance.

It is, of course, a mistake to place emphasis on Hemingway as an author "whose bright fidelity to the perceptible surface of life was accomplished through living dialogue and a prose finely engineered to the accurate renderings of sensuous experience".<sup>31</sup> For Hemingway, "in spite of his insistence upon objective method and realistic tone, depends strongly upon a background of associations and symbols for the depth and mood of his stories".<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Men at War* (1952), p. xi.

<sup>30</sup> *Death in the Afternoon*, p. 192.

<sup>31</sup> E. M. Halliday, "Hemingway's Ambiguity: Symbolism and Irony", *American Literature*, XXVIII (March, 1956), p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Theodore Bardacke, "Hemingway's Women", *Ernest Hemingway: The Man and His Work*, ed. John K. M. McCaffery (1950), p. 341.

Malcolm Cowley in his introduction to *The Portable Hemingway* was first to recognize Hemingway's kinship to such writers as Hawthorne, "the haunted and nocturnal writers, the men who dealt in images that were symbols of an inner world",<sup>33</sup> and to recognize that Hemingway's stories are "nightmares at noonday, accurately described, pictured without blur, but having the nature of obsessions or hypnagogic visions between sleep and waking".<sup>34</sup>

Like Hemingway, Sherwood Anderson makes clear his attitude toward the purpose of fiction and his own art form. Anderson's theories may be reconstructed from many of his writings, including his autobiographical *A Story Teller's Story*, his *Memoirs*, and certain of his letters. Sometimes, as with Lawrence and Mansfield, it is necessary to interpret his metaphoric statements in order to derive from them a discursive statement. But his meaning and his position are clear. Like the other authors discussed, Anderson sees art as a lasting embodiment of truth, whose primary purpose is to delve beneath the world of fact for a reality which is more real than that of the extensional world. In a metaphoric statement Anderson describes the writer of fiction who constructs sentences which are "like windows looking into houses. Something is suddenly torn aside, all lies, all trickery about life gone for a moment."<sup>35</sup> In order to determine truth, the writer must rely upon his imagination, which Anderson equates with fancy. Facts are not important:

Facts elude me; I cannot remember dates. When I deal in facts, at once I begin to lie. I can't help it. I am by nature a story teller. . . . I believe in the imagination, its importance. To me there is a certain music to all good prose writing. There is tone and color in words as in notes in music. Persons also have a certain tone, a certain color. What care I for the person's age, the color of his hair, the length of his legs? When writing of another being I have always found it best to do so in accordance with my feeling. Besides men do not exist in fact. They exist in dreams.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> 1944, p. vii.

<sup>34</sup> Cowley, p. viii.

<sup>35</sup> *A Story Teller's Story* (1924), p. 328.

<sup>36</sup> *Sherwood Anderson's Memoirs* (1942), pp. 7-9.

In an epigrammatic statement Anderson repeats essentially the same thing. The artist, he says, must know "that the unreal is more real than the real, that there is no real other than the unreal".<sup>37</sup> The artist must make use of the extensional world, and this is embodied in the surface content of the story; nevertheless, beyond this surface, there are "shades of things to be caught".<sup>38</sup> The artist who treats only the surface and ties up the action of his plot into a neat little knot is untrue to his craft and does violence to the imaginative world.<sup>39</sup> There are, he says, no plot stories in life:

There was a notion that ran through all storytelling in America, that stories must be built upon a plot. . . . The magazines were filled with these plot stories and most of the plays on our stage were plot plays. "The Poison Plot," I called it in conversation with my friends as the plot notion did seem to me to poison all story-telling. What was wanted I thought was form, not plot, an altogether more elusive and difficult thing to come at.<sup>40</sup>

Anderson's attempt to reach reality through the extensional world was early noted by Harlan Hatcher in his study, *Creating the Modern American Novel*:

Indeed he is not a realist at all in the usual sense of the word. . . . He is a poet and one of the few first-rate symbolists in America. . . . The realistic detail in his work becomes a base for the overtones of dreams. . . . Objective reality is only a starting point on the road into the psyche where its meaning must be sought. It is to be sifted, analyzed, and arranged until it yields this truth on a more difficult plane than the one which describes accurately the ugly buildings along Main Street.<sup>41</sup>

Like Anderson, Eudora Welty has written some short stories generally recognized as among the finest in the language. There has been, however, relatively little study made of Welty's work, and she herself has done little writing about her artistic aims and purposes. Two related articles in the *Atlantic* titled "The

<sup>37</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 439.

<sup>38</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 237.

<sup>40</sup> *A Story Teller's Story*, p. 352.

<sup>41</sup> 1935, p. 161.

Reading and Writing of Short Stories" form the basis for the few remarks that follow.<sup>42</sup> The purpose of art she takes to be communication; the end, the creation of beauty, passion, and truth. In discussing such authors as Lawrence, Hemingway, Faulkner, Mansfield, Woolf, and Anderson, Welty makes much of the fact that the solid outlines of their stories seem to be obscured. The story, she says, "seems bathed in something of its own. It is wrapped in an atmosphere. This is what makes it shine, perhaps, as well as what initially obscures its plain, real shape."<sup>43</sup> Of Hemingway, she comments that his stories are not in the open. "The arena functions like an ambush. Meaning comes not from the front, but from the side."<sup>44</sup> But such stories are not formless. "Form is what is connected with recognition; it is what makes us know, in a story, what we are looking at."<sup>45</sup>

Welty seems to be writing here in much the same way as Lawrence when he speaks of the exterior events of the story as being a subterfuge, obscuring the inner truths. As a matter of fact, Welty comes close to making this kind of statement. "In outward semblance, many stories have plots in common — which is of no more account than that people have blue eyes. Plots are, indeed, what we see with: what's seen is what we're interested in." She feels that a plot is not in the way if it becomes the "outward manifestation of the very germ of the story". The plot "can reveal the secrets of hidden (that is, 'real') life".<sup>46</sup> It would appear here that Welty is saying something very similar to what has been said by the other authors discussed; that is, that the factual level of the story exists in order to reveal the inner truths which the author desires to convey.

It is clear, then, that the literary theory of this representative sampling of modern short story writers emphasizes a reality beyond the extensional world of fact. Their artistic purpose appears to be the same as that of Hawthorne. The question that

<sup>42</sup> February and March, 1949.

<sup>43</sup> February, p. 56.

<sup>44</sup> February, pp. 56-57.

<sup>45</sup> March, p. 47.

<sup>46</sup> March, p. 46.



arises is whether their artistic method is the same, whether they, like Hawthorne, make use of symbols embodied in the narrative structure of their stories to convey multileveled meaning. If their method is the same, then analyses of representative stories will show the similarity.

## THE MODERN SHORT STORY: ANALYSES OF REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### JOSEPH CONRAD: "AN OUTPOST OF PROGRESS"

"An Outpost of Progress" by Joseph Conrad was first published in 1895 in the collection *Tales of Unrest*. Albert J. Guerard, one of Conrad's most noted critics, introduces this short story as interesting chiefly as a cold adumbration of *Heart of Darkness*. The "hard-won groping intuitions of *Heart of Darkness* are here presented by the detached omniscient author with essay-like explicitness".<sup>1</sup> It is true that an omniscient author makes some points explicitly, but these points convey meaning only on the simplest level.

Reality exists in multifold appearances. Conrad's usual method of handling point of view makes clear his awareness of this truth. The narrator, Marlow, is a "many-sided character, a union of sentiment, morality, cynicism, and curiosity. His impressions of reality distort it before passing it on to the reader, and before Marlow receives it, it has been distorted by the temperaments and memories of those who report it to him."<sup>2</sup> With such a narrator the point of view serves to set up distance through which truth may be reflected. Methods of achieving distance vary, but always the purpose is to put the reader into proper focus so that he will be able to apprehend the meaning which the author is attempting to convey. In "Outpost of Progress" Conrad does not use a narrator of the Marlow type; rather, as

<sup>1</sup> Conrad, *The Novelist* (1958), p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> William York Tindall, *Forces in Modern British Literature: 1885-1956* (1956), p. 193.

omniscient author, Conrad makes use of another method of achieving distance — irony, which forces the reader to assume a position outside of the immediate action and to reflect upon the total pattern, for meaning in this story comes not from sympathy with and recognition of the problems of Kayerts and Carlier exclusively, but from recognition of the problems of man as reflected in the pattern of symbols used to structure the story. The major characters operate as symbols within the total pattern and have no more significance than any other symbol used.

The literal level of narration may be briefly summarized. Two young Englishmen, Kayerts, as chief, and Carlier, as his assistant, are sent to a trading post in the Congo. The former chief, an unsuccessful painter who had built the post, has died from a fever. His grave, marked by a tall leaning cross, is some distance from the main buildings but in sight of them. The staff at the outpost consists of Henry Price, called Makola, and ten other natives. While Makola takes care of the business, Kayerts and Carlier settle down and for five months live a life that is devoid of spiritual and intellectual content, and even of physical activity, since Gobila, a chief of a neighboring tribe, takes a paternal interest in them and sends daily supplies.

Their life is then disturbed by the appearance of six armed men. Kayerts and Carlier are incapable of dealing with them, but Makola learns that they are traders who have more ivory than they can carry home. Kayerts authorizes Makola to trade with the men. He then acquires a fine lot of ivory, six valuable tusks. After it is too late to do anything about it, Kayerts and Carlier learn that Makola has exchanged for the ivory the ten station men and a number of men from Gobila's tribe. At first indignant, Kayerts and Carlier declare that they cannot accept the ivory. They order Makola to throw it into the river. Makola, however, waits and the next morning sets about weighing the tusks. Later, the two white men appear to help with the weighing and storing.

They rationalize their behavior but become increasingly uncomfortable because of it. Kayerts becomes silent and gloomy,

Carlier, sarcastic and unpleasant. Gobila, angered and mourning the loss of his men no longer sends food. The steamer is overdue; the men are sick, hungry, and desperate. As the result of a quarrel over some sugar, Kayerts shoots and kills Carlier. Early the next morning the whistle of the steamer sounds notice of its return. Seemingly unable to face a return to civilization, Kayerts hangs himself in the cross above the grave of his predecessor.

At first glance it would appear that Conrad tells here a simple story concerning the impotence of two white men who are unable to deal with their surroundings, but to leave the story at this level is to ignore the network of symbols wherein setting, characters, and action take on greater significance.

The title of the story sheds light on the significance of the setting. An ironic commentary on the trading station, the title implies that progress is the result of the white man's attempt to trade the merest trifles for the ivory tusks indigenous to the Congo. But this is not all, for not only are the white man's motives called into question, but so are his values. What Conrad does in this story is take the society out of itself and place it in a kind of primordial wilderness in order to test the efficacy of the values it holds. Nor is this all, for by means of the symbols Conrad questions the meaning of life itself. He presents a symbolic picture of life in little, from birth to death, and shows that the symbolic wilderness prevails, as the uninhibited responses of man, his brutal instincts lead invariably to his death.

The outpost of progress stands in a clearing that is cut off from the rest of the world by a river. This clearing, identified with the white men who inhabit it, represents the void around which life flows on. The Managing Director who has brought the men to the post knows that they are incapable, impotent, enervated. In a sense he abandons them, useless men at what he knows is a useless station. He leaves them alone in a vast and dark country, unassisted to face the wilderness. Neither their achievements nor their values will help; indeed the implication is clear that they have none they can call their own, for achievements and values belong not to individuals but to

the civilization which believes blindly in the verity of itself. The individuals, then, are in fact, alone and empty. They are the void of the clearing.

In the beginning Kayerts and Carlier get on well together in the fellowship of their stupidity and laziness, living "like blind men in a large room, aware only of what comes in contact with them (and of that only imperfectly), but unable to see the general aspect of things".<sup>3</sup> The river on whose banks they live and the forest which surrounds them throb with life, but for them there is only emptiness.

The contrast between the white and black societies is presented in the opening pages of the story. Kayerts and Carlier stand as representatives of white society. The values that they hold attach to the civilization and not to them. On the other hand, the black man, Makola, has values which are his, different from those of the white man but effective, since they enable him to live and to adapt to changing conditions. Conrad tells us that Makola worships evil spirits and, indeed, gets on very well with his god. The other natives are represented by Gobila and his tribe, who remain in their homes and live there in accordance with their own customs; the station men who have been transplanted; and by the warlike natives whose arrival precipitates the crisis. The other whites are the director of the trading stations and the artist, who has died at the outpost of progress.

The artist has great significance within the context of the story. Traditionally a creator, he is a creator here also, for the artist "planned and watched the construction" of the outpost (p. 460). In his own civilization he had been unsuccessful and had become "weary of pursuing fame on an empty stomach" (p. 460). The artist, therefore, had come to the Congo to establish the station. Unsuccessful in one environment, he had moved to another, where he achieved at least partial success in that he cleared the post, erected the buildings, and made friendly con-

<sup>3</sup> *The Indispensable Conrad*, p. 465. Citations are to this edition. The stories analyzed in this chapter are frequently anthologized and there are no textual problems. Consequently I have followed the practice of citing the books with which I worked, since they were near at hand.



tact with Gobila and his tribe. But the artist eventually failed, dying of fever, his death suggesting that he was unequipped to handle his new environment.

Although not a major character in the story, the artist is a skillfully deployed symbol, for his presence is pervasive. Kayerts and Carlier live in the building the artist has constructed; they read the novels and papers he has left behind; and the ground over his grave supports the cross which brings the basic values of Christianity into the realm of Conrad's questionings.

Like the artist, the Managing Director occupies an important symbolic role. His title indicates his position of authority; he stands as a leader of men, one who is responsible for their physical and spiritual well-being. He travels in a sardine-box steamer, small, ugly, and crowded with the materials of barter. The steamer might be regarded as a microcosm of the society of which he is a symbol; his crass attitude toward the men he leaves in the wilderness might be regarded as the attitude of the leaders of the society which he represents. His action of raising the cross over the grave of the dead artist links him with those in religious authority who provide signs devoid of meaning for the worship of men.

In the forest live Gobila and his tribesmen, without whose help the white men cannot survive. Paternal in manner, Gobila seems to love all white men. The artist is the first white man he knows intimately; and, since all white men appear to him indistinguishably alike, he transfers his affection to Kayerts and Carlier. The white men return Gobila's affection, but condescendingly, as the artist had. There is no real understanding between them. Carlier slaps Gobila on the back; Kayerts strikes matches for the old man's amusement. Because there is no understanding, at the moment of crisis Gobila and his people stay away. Because they do, Kayerts and Carlier are faced with the possibility of starvation. By themselves they cannot find enough food for sustenance.

The ten station men have been engaged by the director for six months, but since the natives have no notion of the white man's time, they have been at the outpost for more than two

years. Like Kayerts and Carlier they are unhappy, mourning the loss of their homes and their people. They are, in effect, slaves to the outpost of progress, and there is little difference whether they remain at the station or go with the warlike natives as barter for ivory tusks. But Kayerts and Carlier, paying lip service to the idea that slavery is evil, show indignation when Makola reveals the action he has taken. The white men, however, soon forget their indignation and eventually feel the tusks more important than the lives of the station men.

Fear, common to all men, stands revealed as the primary motivation for behavior. The warlike men, who inspire fear in both blacks and whites, are important in so far as they precipitate the crisis. Tall and powerful, they carry guns over bare shoulders. Their speech startles the white men. "It was like a reminiscence of something not exactly familiar, and yet resembling the speech of civilized men. It sounded like one of those impossible languages which sometimes we hear in our dreams" (p. 470). Makola shows great excitement, and Kayerts and Carlier realize for the first time "that they lived in conditions where the unusual may be dangerous, and that there was no power on earth outside of themselves to stand between them and the unusual" (pp. 470-471). The natives around also show fear. All night the drums beat, "as if the whole land had been one intense drum booming out steadily an appeal to heaven" (p. 471).

But if the actions of the warlike natives precipitate the crisis, it is the fear which each of the white men feels that eventually causes his destruction. When the final quarrel develops between Kayerts and Carlier, Kayerts acts out of fear: "And suddenly it seemed to Kayerts that he had never seen that man [Carlier] before. Who was he? He knew nothing of him. What was he capable of?" (p. 482). Carlier's death is, in fact, an accident, caused by Kayerts' fear. Kayerts has a revolver and believes that Carlier has one. In their chase around and around the house, once they meet, and a loud noise explodes. At first Kayerts believes that he is the one who is hit, but finally he sees the dead Carlier. Makola leads Kayerts to a chair near the body. The Negro finds just one revolver and later ascertains that Car-

lier was unarmed. Kayerts shuts his eyes. "He had shot an unarmed man." Makola offers Kayerts a way out of his difficulty. "He died of fever", Makola states. "Bury him tomorrow" (p. 486). The Negro moves away, leaving Kayerts by the body, where he remains through the night. He sits thinking, Conrad says, very new thoughts:

His old thoughts, convictions, likes and dislikes . . . appeared in their true light at last. Appeared contemptible and childish, false and ridiculous. He reveled in his new wisdom. . . . He argued with himself about all the things under heaven with that kind of wrong-headed lucidity which may be observed in some lunatics. (p. 486)

Kayerts rationalizes Carlier's death. Every day, he reflects, men die by the thousands, and, in this number, one additional death cannot make any difference. He has been all his life a believer in a lot of nonsense, but now he knows; he is familiar with the highest wisdom.

At this moment Kayerts tries to imagine himself dead and Carlier sitting in the chair. His efforts meet with extraordinary success, and soon he is not sure who is dead and who alive. Kayerts' thinking here regarding life and death makes a striking progression. In order he believes that 1) life and death are equally difficult and terrible; 2) life is more difficult and terrible than death; 3) life becomes, in a moment of imagination, death. The next step in the progression occurs later when life becomes death as Kayerts dies on the cross.

With a great effort Kayerts succeeds in breaking the imaginative spell. He saves himself "just in time" from becoming Carlier. Then he falls asleep. When he awakens he again sees the body and he cries out. His cry is followed by the inhuman shrieks of the steamer now arriving. The morning is filled with fog, a heavy mist that clings and kills:

Progress was calling to Kayerts from the river. Progress and civilization and all the virtues. Society was calling to its accomplished child to come, to be taken care of, to be instructed, to be judged, to be condemned; it called him to return to that rubbish heap from which he had wandered away, so that justice could be done.

Kayerts heard and understood (pp. 487-488). But what does Kayerts understand? Does he understand the irony of the steamer's arrival, its purpose to bring him back to the land of progress, or does he understand that he must be condemned for his actions? In other words, does he kill himself because he recognizes that life in the land of progress is empty, its values worthless; or simply to avoid punishment, because he cannot face trial for murder? The suggestion is that Kayerts perceives that the illusions which he has accepted as truths no longer exist for him. Yet he retains one faith — the value of the cross.

His death on the cross necessarily involves two concepts — sacrifice and rebirth. The cross is the symbol of Christianity, of the Holy Trinity, and, as such, it encompasses the religious values of the white civilization. Christ's death on the cross was a sacrifice of his life for the sins of mankind. Traditionally, also, the cross is the symbol of rebirth. But it has little value in the primordial wilderness. Significantly, the Managing Director erects the cross over the grave which Makola has dug. It becomes, thus, a sign of Christian civilization. Each of the white men has contact with it. Carlier replants it, making it firm; Kayerts dies on it. But neither in his lifetime participates in its value. To each it is a sign without real significance in the ordering and directing of life. Yet it is a sign not easily erased; thus, at the end, Kayerts moves toward it. Like a man who has lost his way, through the mist of death — white, silent, and enveloping fog — he moves toward a dark smudge, a cross-shaped stain upon the purity of the mist. The symbol of the cross, combined with the idea that it is a stain upon the purity of the mist, suggests that sacrifice upon it is in vain at the same time that it rejects the notion of rebirth, as indeed, the last scene makes clear. When the Managing Director finds Kayerts hanging from the cross, the dead man's tongue irreverently protrudes from his mouth, as though pointed at the director, silently mocking.

The progress of man from life to death is shown by the symbols employed in the story. Kayerts and Carlier are brought to the outpost by means of a river, symbol of the life force. They are delivered by the Managing Director, who symbolically gives



them life. As director, he embodies both God figure and father figure. The steamer which conveys them is symbolically a mother figure. Thus the symbols suggesting birth are complete. As Kayerts and Carlier walk up the banks of the river toward the outpost of progress, they walk arm in arm, "drawing close to one another as children do in the dark" (p. 462). Thus the image of childhood is suggested. In this state they are still protected by the illusions they carry of the values that sustain them. But they grow, and the moment of crisis comes when they are unable to apply these values to a situation which they recognize as evil. They hesitate over and later reject the notion of acting on their convictions. They accept the ivory tusks for the lives of men. After this action they symbolically lose their sustenance — both physical and spiritual. Gobila stops feeding them and their sustaining images of home recede. Surrounded by the wilderness, the impenetrable bush, symbolic of the uninhibited responses of man, his fear of the dangers which beset him plus his instinctual responses to the end of selfpreservation which overlay the civilized values of love as basis for life, Kayerts and Carlier are alone. Without their illusions to shelter them, they cannot live; the dangers of the bush are too great. At the last Kayerts holds to his faith in the Christian idea of rebirth, but this remaining value is clouded and then shown to be shadow, stain.

#### KATHERINE MANSFIELD: "THE FLY"

"The Fly" was published in 1923 in *The Dove's Nest*, Katherine Mansfield's last published volume. Sylvia Berkman, in her critical study of Mansfield, says that the central symbolism in "The Fly" is confused:

Obviously the boss stands for a superior controlling power — God, destiny, or fate — which in capricious and impersonal cruelty tortures the little creature struggling under this hand until it lies still in death. At the same time the boss is presented as one who has himself received the blows of this superior power through the death of



his only son in the war. Thus the functional role which the boss plays in the story does not fuse with the symbolic role.<sup>4</sup>

It appears to me, however, that Professor Berkman fails to perceive the symbolic relationship between microcosm and macrocosm which makes the boss part in relation to whole and shows him acting both as father figure and God figure. In his symbolic role he may play as many parts as the symbol will extend to include, and the symbol will extend as far as the author sees relationships which it may encompass. Further, the central symbolism does not revolve around the boss as God, but rather about the boss as human, for the strongest symbolic identification is that of the boss with the fly, which is the symbol for all humanity.

Professor Berkman is surely right when she asserts that Katherine Mansfield must have had in mind two statements concerning the fly — one her own notation in her *Journal* and the other Shakespeare's well-known comment. Mansfield wrote:

Oh, the times when she had walked upside down on the ceiling, run up glittering panes, floated on a lake of light, flashed through a shining beam!

And God looked upon the fly fallen into the jug of milk and saw that it was good. And the smallest Cherubim and Seraphim of all, who delight in misfortune, struck their silver harps and shrilled: "How is the fly fallen, fallen!"<sup>5</sup>

Shakespeare's lines in *King Lear* are also significant: "As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods. / They kill us for their sport." Pertinent, too, is Professor Berkman's interpretation of the meaning of the fly. "The insect", she says, "is created in multitudes; he is born, exists for his little time, or is destroyed by any one of a thousand accidents. He is at the mercy of a capricious force that has brought him into being and determines his extinction."<sup>6</sup>

On the surface level, the story recounts certain experiences which lead to the killing of a fly. A man, identified only as the

<sup>4</sup> *Katherine Mansfield: A Critical Study* (1951), p. 195.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Berkman, p. 194.

<sup>6</sup> Berkman, p. 194.

boss, receives a visitor, Mr. Woodifield, an old man, nearing senility. Although five years older than his visitor, the boss is stout, rosy, and strong. As they sit and talk in the newly decorated office, the boss flips the pages of *The Financial Times*. He is proud and satisfied to be admired especially by Woodifield, who finally recalls that he has something to relate; but he cannot remember it. Feeling a kindly pity for the old man in front of him, the boss offers Woodifield whiskey. Woodifield is not allowed to drink, but the boss waves away objections. The drink warms the old man, and he remembers what he wanted to say — that his family had been in Belgium visiting his own son's grave, which lies close to that of the boss's son. Having said what he came to say, the old man chats on, but the boss does not hear. After Woodifield leaves, the boss closes the door and sits at his desk. "He wanted, he intended, he had arranged to weep."<sup>7</sup>

In the past the boss had only to mention the name of his son and he would be overcome by violent weeping; but now, something is wrong; he is unable to weep. He looks at the boy's photograph and sees there a cold and stern-looking youth. The boy, he thinks, had never looked like that. At this moment he notices a fly.

The fly has fallen into an inkpot and is struggling to get out. The boss lifts the fly out to a blotter and watches as it begins the arduous process of wiping itself clean. When it is dry, the boss has an idea. He drops a blot of ink directly on the fly and then watches it begin the task again. He admires the fly's courage: "That was the way to tackle things; that was the right spirit. Never say die" (p. 210). The fly finishes again and the boss drops another drop of ink. Again the fly struggles to escape. The third blot of ink kills the fly. Lifting the corpse, the boss flings it into the waste-paper basket. A grinding feeling of wretchedness seizes him and he feels frightened. He calls to an employee for fresh blotting paper and then tries to recall

<sup>7</sup> Oscar Cargill, et al., *New Highways in College Composition*, Second Edition (1955), p. 209. Citations are to this edition.

what he had been thinking of before the episode with the fly. But he finds that he cannot remember.

The fly, as I have said, is the dominant symbol here. Its name titles the story; as symbol, its meaning encompasses all the characters in the story; the major episode in which it is concerned climaxes the story. The fly represents not only man's insignificance in relation to a controlling power, but also the highest aspirations and yearning of the human soul. "To fly" is to escape earth-bound reality and to soar through the heavens. To have dominion of the air is to be, like Daedalus and Icarus, as a god. But, as in the Icarus legend, "to fly" might mean to travel too near the sun and thus to fall; or, through pride, to aim too high and to be cast into hell. Surely Mansfield had this relation of ideas in mind when she wrote: "Oh, how is the fly fallen, fallen!" The biblical style and allusions of the passage suggest such a line from Isaiah: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" Such Biblical reference adds dimension and depth to the symbol. The fly represents man's aspirations as well as his temporal existence; it images his rise and fall. In this story the episode of the fly suggests the progression of man from birth to death. The fly's struggle to escape from the inkpot is a clear birth image; its battle against continuing adversity suggests man's progress through life; its death as a result of a capricious force suggests man's attitude toward his own mortality, where all his struggles lead to the grave.

The fly must be recognized as a symbol for all the characters in the story. The boss, the boss' son, and old Woodifield are flies in relation to a controlling force. Each has already come under the control of this force. The boss has lost a son; the son is killed in his youth; Woodifield has suffered a stroke which has brought him to premature senility.

The boss has seen his son in his own image: "Life itself had come to have no other meaning" (p. 209). The boy's promise had been near being fulfilled, but then he went to the war and was killed. The boss had his grief for six years. "Time he had declared . . . could make no difference. Other men perhaps might recover, might live their loss down, but not he. How was it

possible?" (p. 209). But at the climactic moment, the boss is unable to weep. Even his sustaining grief has departed. He is left with nothing — not even memories: "He fell to wondering what it was he had been thinking about before. What was it? It was. . . . He took out his handkerchief and passed it inside his collar. *For the life of him* he could not remember" (p. 210).

The passage which I underline above is not simply an idiomatic expression, but it has meaning in literal terms. The boss, who had lived for his son, in finally recognizing the boy's death, is at the moment of his own symbolic death. He has attempted to create in his son the means of his own immortality; now, in recognizing the finality of the boy's death, the boss must recognize his own mortality. Unable to weep, the boss turns his attention to the struggling fly and, himself playing two roles in the symbolic drama, accomplishes the end of relieving his feelings. Playing the role of God or destiny, he blots out the life of the fly, as his son's life had been blotted out, as his own life is to come to an end.

But why does the boss at this time, after six years, come to recognize the finality of his son's death? Before Woodifield's visit he had never actually thought of the boy as being dead, but rather as "lying unchanged, unblemished in his uniform" (p. 209). His grief had been for one away but not destroyed. The answer to the question comes from a perception of the role played in the story by old Woodifield. Woodifield, too, is a fly. As a symbol of human mortality, he embodies the notion of birth and death. He appears as a baby in a pram; he is muffled like an infant in blankets. For six days of the week he is kept boxed up like a baby in a crib; but on one day he is dressed and brushed by his wife and daughters and allowed to go to town. But old Woodifield is also an aging man. He has had a stroke and has retired; he is old and frail. The care that he receives, the muffling, is not that accorded an infant beginning life but actually that of an old man nearing death; thus the image of the pram suggests both carriage and coffin, symbolizing at once birth and death.

The boss' actions toward the aged Woodifield are symbolical-



ly life-giving and life-taking. Feeling kindly toward Woodifield, he offers him whiskey, saying, "It wouldn't hurt a child" (p. 208). The offering of the bottle suggests feeding a baby, a life-sustaining action. The suggestion is enforced by the appearance of Woodifield, who looks as if he is going to cry when he mentions that the women will not allow him this kind of bottle. But the bottle here is not life-sustaining; having had a stroke, Woodifield is forbidden to drink whiskey. Thus the boss' actions suggest unreasoned and capricious playing with life. The symbolic action of giving the whiskey is, in effect, the same kind of action that the boss takes with the fly. Woodifield is no more capable of resisting the whiskey than the fly is of escaping the ink, for he has no will to resist. The dominant personality of the boss prevails.

He is given no other name. Thus Mansfield forces recognition of his symbolic role; he represents the controller — in relation to Woodifield, in relation to his son, whose life he has planned, in relation to the fly, whose life he takes away. The boss is proud of his possessions; he is proud to show off his newly decorated office, with his paper knife and his *Financial Times*, with his whiskey obtained from the cellars of Windsor Castle. But Woodifield's visit reminds the boss that he is not the ultimate controller. By mentioning the boss' son, who lies in a grave, Woodifield forces on the boss the realization of death and failure.

Old Woodifield has had a son, but now his son is dead, and Woodifield is close to death. The boss has had a son, and he has expected by means of his son to achieve his own immortality; but his son is dead, not "merely asleep". There is no longer any escaping that, and, if his son is dead, his own aspirations will be unrealized. His own death is the incontestable reality he must face. But he does not give in to this idea without a struggle; his immediate feelings of anger and resentment cause him again to play the role of God — to give life and to take it away. With a pen he helps the fly to get out of the inkpot. With admiration he watches the fly struggle, for it is his own determination to live that he sees in the fly's efforts. At the moment of the fly's



death the man must recognize that his own efforts, too, will eventually be blotted out. Despite his creations, his aspirations, and his struggles, death is his ultimate end.

It is necessary to recognize that man is both creator and destroyer. He is life-giver, but the concept of life embodies the concept of death. Man gives life, but in giving it, paradoxically, he takes it away; he is not only agent but victim of his own aspirations. The symbol of the fly encompasses both these concepts. The fly can run up glittering panes, float on a lake of light, flash through a shining beam, but in the end, "How is the fly fallen, fallen".

#### D. H. LAWRENCE: "THE ROCKING-HORSE WINNER"

One of D. H. Lawrence's most frequently reprinted stories, "The Rocking-Horse Winner", was published in 1933 in the collection *The Lovely Lady*. The story begins as a fairy tale might:

There was a woman who was beautiful, who started with all the advantages, yet she had no luck. She married for love, and the love turned to dust. She had bonny children, yet she felt they had been thrust upon her, and she could not love them.<sup>8</sup>

Discussing the several characteristics of this story common to the form of the fable or Märchen of folklore, Frank Amon says:

Like the fable, it has two parts: the narrative which exemplifies a moral, and the statement of the moral appended in the form of a proverb. Moreover the syntactical and rhetorical devices of the opening paragraph exploit a formulaic beginning common to most Märchen, the characters not named, and some explanation concerning the cause of the difficulty which the story is to illustrate dramatically. . . . And in fact the whispering house and the powers of divination ascribed to Paul . . . indicate to what extent Lawrence went to establish the tone and atmosphere of a modern moral fable.<sup>9</sup>

Another characteristic of the fairy tale, one which Amon does

<sup>8</sup> Caroline Gordon and Allen Tate, *The House of Fiction* (1954), p. 337. Citations are to this text.

<sup>9</sup> "D. H. Lawrence and the Short Story", *The Achievement of D. H. Lawrence*, eds. Frederick J. Hoffman and Harry T. Moore (1953), p. 232.

not mention, but which helps to explain the appearance of the uncle in "The Rocking-Horse Winner", is that discussed by Jung in his *Psyche & Symbol*. Jung notes the occurrence of a wise old man who personifies spirit or thought and who helps to point the moral of the tale.<sup>10</sup>

The story is, as Amon suggests, an "ironic variation of the Rags-to-Riches motif through the supernatural powers of the first-born son".<sup>11</sup> And, in fact, it is through this variation that the story has its special significance. At surface level the narrative concerns a youth who is destroyed through his frantic efforts to insure his family's fortune. The youth, Paul, rides his rocking-horse to find winners in the horse races. He is motivated to this action in order to make money which he feels his family needs; however, the more money he makes, the more his family and the house seem to need. As the day for the big race draws near, Paul has been unable to find the winner, although he has ridden his horse with desperation. Finally one night his mother finds him in a trance-like state; he has determined the winner, but his effort has caused delirium. For three days he is ill, until, learning that his horse has won, he dies in the night. Paul's uncle points the moral: "He's best gone out of a life where he rides his rocking-horse to find a winner!" (p. 348).

But why is Paul's death necessary? In the fairy story, the young prince invariably lives happily ever after; here, however, his death is inevitable. The answer to the question lies partially in the person of the father, the most elusive character in the story. He is introduced as a man without luck, whose good prospects never materialize and whose tastes are expensive beyond his means. His overt actions in the story are two: he mixes a whiskey and soda, and he says, "I don't know", in response to a question. Both actions are inconsequential. In this characterization Lawrence presents a sharp picture of the ineffectual male, inadequate as father and husband.

In contrast to the father, the mother tries to provide for the family, assuming the male role. At first she is not successful,

<sup>10</sup> Ed. Violet S. deLaszlo (1958), p. 75.

<sup>11</sup> Amon, p. 232.

though she tries one thing and then another. Finally she does find work, but she is not satisfied with it. Assuming the dominant role of her own accord, she is, nevertheless, bitter, and her bitterness is directed toward her husband and children. She ascribes the position of her family to her possession of an unlucky husband. Paul questions her:

"And aren't you lucky either, mother?"

"I can't be, if I married an unlucky husband."

"But by yourself, aren't you?"

"I used to think I was, before I married. Now I think I am very unlucky indeed." (pp. 338-339)

Caught in this struggle between husband and wife, Paul asserts himself to be lucky, and then seeks to find the clue to "luck". He sits on his rocking-horse and, with wild frenzy, charges madly into space. "Now", he commands his snorting steed, "take me to where there is luck! Now, take me!" (p. 339).

In this pursuit Paul attempts to take the place of his father in his mother's life. He seeks her love by providing her with money which is gained through luck. Thus a strange network of equalities is apparent. Love is equated with money as money is equated with luck. Love, then, comes to equal luck. Further, another set of equations arises when the means of Paul's pursuit is examined. For Paul in riding his horse subconsciously assumes a sexual role. In his attempt to take the place of the father, he assumes the symbolic position of rider to horse, a position traditionally associated with the sex act. Now, since in the other set of equations luck equals love, it can be stated that love equals sex, and further, since money equals love, money equals sex. This becomes clearer if set down in the following manner.

$$\begin{array}{ccc}
 \text{Money} & \begin{array}{c} \diagdown \quad = \quad \diagup \\ \diagup \quad = \quad \diagdown \end{array} & \text{Love} \\
 & & \\
 \text{Luck} & & \text{Sex}
 \end{array}$$

This network of equations forms the value system in which the story is set. The father, lacking luck, has no money, and consequently no love. The mother, lacking money, has no love. The boy seeks luck to gain love.

The rocking-horse, as dominant symbol, encompasses this network of equations and points to meaning on at least three different levels. The horse is traditionally a sexual symbol. In the story all of the male characters show a vital interest in horse racing with the exception of the father, who in his role of ineffective male is seen symbolically as impotent. But their interest in racing is an interest in the gaining of money. Their interest in the horse, then, indicates a society where the primary function of sex is displaced. Thus the symbol has meaning on a social level, where characters are seen to locate the value of sex in money. This dislocation of value is made even more forceful by the identification of the horse with a false horse, a rocking-horse, a steed of wood. The riding of the false horse, or, in other terms, the hobby horse, points to a static society where men move at a furious pace in a mechanical gallop without advancement. All that is accomplished is an exhaustion which makes any real goal-seeking impossible. It is a society that seeks security and happiness in money, which is taken to be the only means of achieving that goal.

It is evident from the story that the actual need is not for more money, for the house with its garden is pleasant, there are servants, and both husband and wife have an income. The need, rather, is for the effective handling of the facts of life. But the realities of life are never faced in the heedless rush on the mechanical horse. Such a pursuit is enervating, leading to death. It is this fact which the uncle emphasizes at the end of the story, when, speaking to his sister, the boy's mother, he says, "My God, Hester, you're eighty-odd thousand to the good and a poor devil of a son to the bad. But, poor devil, poor devil, he's best gone out of a life where he rides his rocking-horse to find a winner." What the uncle does not express, however, is the implication of the moral in terms of the whole society which takes such false values as ideals. By his use of this symbol, Lawrence indicts the whole society and prophesies its destruction.

Such pursuit is destructive not only to the society as a whole, but also to the individual, whose growth is thwarted by the

demands of the society. When a child must live at the mercy of demands which are impossible to meet, his development is inhibited by fear and anxiety. Individuality is destroyed, just as Paul is, at last, destroyed. He is forced by the demands of the family and the house, the symbolic microcosm of the society, to assume too young the role of provider. Caught in the conflict created by the society, the boy feels a compelling need to meet its demands. Because he is a child he accepts the society's statement of its need and mounts a hobby horse in pursuit of its false values. The house in which he lives is haunted by the unspoken phrase, "There must be more money! There must be more money!" The child can hear it all the time. The whisper is everywhere, though no one speaks it aloud. The rhythm of the phrase as it is repeated corresponds to the rhythm of the rocking-horse as Paul moves it at an increasing pace. The voices in the house suddenly go mad. As the noises increase and come faster, the boy's rocking becomes more wild and frenzied. He cannot keep up with the demand; there can be no solution, for the answer he seeks cannot solve the problem; false values cannot sustain life.

Perhaps the most striking implication provided by the symbol of the rocking-horse lies in its association with the sex act and the meaning to be derived from such identification. Mother and son take part in this symbolic act. The mother is a neurotic woman who is unable to find satisfaction in her primary role. She withdraws from her husband and children and seeks satisfaction in social status and material gains. She married for love, but her love has turned to dust. "At the centre of her heart was a hard little place that could not feel love, no, not for anybody" (p. 337). Her character molded by the society, she holds the values of the society, and in the association of luck with love, the lack of luck in her life results in a lack of love. Her unlucky husband cannot hold her love. Her children feel the barrenness of her affection. Paul especially is concerned with satisfying her needs in an attempt to gain her affection. He comes to her for information, wanting to know why they are poor. The mother puts all blame on the father. He is unlucky, she says,



and she is unlucky to have married him. When Paul asserts that he is a lucky person, his mother laughs. Angered, he determines to find the luck that his father does not have.

In the rocking-horse, symbolically sexual, he attempts to achieve his goal. He sits upon the rocking-horse charging madly into space. He slashes the horse with his whip, feeling he can force it to fulfil his needs. Finally he succeeds in locating luck, and with it comes money, which he arranges to give to his mother. But his gift is no help, for the neurotic need which she has cannot be filled. The boy, however, does not know this, and he attempts to supply more and more. Thus he steps into the role of provider. He tries to supply his mother with luck-money-love and, in terms of the equation previously stated, sex. The riding of the horse is, in effect, a sexual act with the mother, as the boy attempts to fill the role of the father. It is, of course, an unconscious act, but though it is unconscious, the youth still feels guilt and anxiety. His wooden horse is his "secret of secrets", "that which had no name" (p. 346).

The mother is in strange communion with her son. Although she is not consciously aware of his actions, she becomes aware of his anxieties. "His mother had sudden seizures of uneasiness about him. Sometimes, for half-an-hour, she would feel a sudden anxiety about him that was almost anguish. She wanted to rush to him at once, and know he was safe" (p. 346). On the last of these occasions she stands outside his door. Hearing a strange, heavy, and yet not loud noise, she feels that she recognizes it, but she cannot place it. Finally she opens the door and sees something plunging to and fro. At this moment there is a clear suggestion of a symbolic union. She switches on the light and sees her son in green pajamas madly surging on the rocking-horse, and the light falls upon her also as she stands in the doorway in a dress of pale green. This ride is Paul's last. His excessive guilt causes him to turn the death wish upon himself.

In this way character, setting, and action serve as symbols to direct meaning, and over all is the dominant figure of the rocking-horse, which holds in itself the entire conflict. As symbol, it extends to encompass the levels of social, personal, and

sexual reality, where the image of a boy mounted on a wooden horse is the means of an author's revelation of truth.

### WILLIAM FAULKNER: "WASH"

Published in 1934 in the collection *Doctor Martino and Other Stories*, the short story "Wash" by William Faulkner was later reworked to take a climactic place in the novel *Absalom, Absalom!* Despite its place in the novel, however, the story stands alone as a complete entity, somewhat different in total content, meaning, and emphasis from the position it occupies in the novel. In the novel the story is an episode which takes on additional meaning and has particular significance in terms of the novel as a whole. It is especially important to recognize that Thomas Sutpen, who is the protagonist of the novel, is not the protagonist of "Wash". In the short story Sutpen is given little motivation and is treated with such a minimum of details that he is little more than a stark outline which suggests not a human being but an impersonal force which is beyond good or evil. In the short story Wash is the protagonist and the major emphasis in the story is on his psychological motivation. This is not to say that the imaginative scope of the story is limited. The symbolic framework does allow other themes to develop.

The story concerns a man who is frustrated in his attempt to escape the reality of his existence. Wash is a shiftless white man who has attached himself to the plantation and person of Thomas Sutpen. Sutpen has allowed Wash to live in a dilapidated fishing shack and has occasionally drunk with him from a common stoneware jug in a scuppernong arbor. When the Civil War comes Sutpen goes away to fight for his land and his rights of possession. Wash remains behind, saying, to the amusement of others, that he has to care for Sutpen's home. Sutpen returns a broken man, but not a defeated one. He opens a store and attempts to beget an heir upon Milly, Wash's granddaughter. Wash knows what is happening but he does nothing to prohibit his grandchild or to indicate any displeasure. For two

years Wash endures the situation and the whispered comments and gossip of the Negroes and the white men who loaf around the store. When Milly becomes pregnant, Wash sees her grow more brazen and defiant. But a girl child is born, and Sutpen does not behave in the way that Wash has anticipated. At the shack on the morning that the child is born, Wash hears Sutpen speak to the girl. "Well, Milly, too bad you're not a mare. Then I could give you a decent stall in the stable."<sup>12</sup> When Sutpen emerges from the cabin, Wash kills him with a scythe. By sunset a posse has gathered outside the shack. In the dark of the cabin Wash kills Milly and her child, sets fire to the shack, and, wildly brandishing the scythe, rushes at the armed and waiting posse.

Such are the surface events of the story, but they do not explain the deeper meaning which involves not only conflicts within the society but also conflicts within the protagonist which lead him to the action he takes. The characters, setting, and action function as representative elements enabling Faulkner to portray a microcosm mirroring the whole of Southern society. The characters represent the social strata of the civilization. Wash, the poor white man who occupies an indeterminate place in the society, is shown in relation to Sutpen, the plantation owner who runs the land and owns the Negroes who do his bidding. In this way the characters in the specific area of the Sutpen plantation take on greater significance, since they come to represent the entire South, once proud in its glory, now struggling in its ruin. The story can be read as an allegory of the destruction of a social system. The inequalities of the system, as represented in this story, are suffered not so much by the slaves as by the poor whites. The poor white, as represented by Wash, lacks the personal qualities that have made it possible for a man to Sutpen's character to create an empire from the wilderness. Wash is denied even the dignity of labor which is performed by slaves and is thereby degrading for a white man to undertake. Having no real place in the society, Wash is

<sup>12</sup> *The Collected Stories of William Faulkner* (1950). p. 535. Citations are to this edition.

able to exist only by Sutpen's dispensation and is in a position which is necessarily dependent upon a man who has no need of him. The inequalities of a system which gives a man no place in the society make the system untenable, since it harbors the elements of its own destruction. Wash says:

*Better if his kind and mine too had never  
drawn the breath of life on this earth.  
Better that all who remain of us be blasted  
from the face of earth than that another  
Wash Jones should see his whole life  
shredded from him and shrivel away like  
a dried shuck thrown onto the fire.*

(pp. 548-549)

Significantly, Wash is given no past or antecedents. He simply appears one day on the plantation, and Sutpen allows him to stay. The theme of economic subjugation is suggested in the relationship between the two men and in the roles they play. Wash's dependence upon Sutpen, as is the case with all such unnatural dependent states, requires an uncommon amount of aggression, concealed though it is, to be maintained. Sutpen's arrogant acceptance of this position becomes the arrogance of his class, and his inability to maintain it is the failure of this class.

At this point it is well to ask why it is necessary that Wash kill Sutpen, symbolically effecting the destruction of the class, when the Civil War has already accomplished the same end by reducing Sutpen very nearly to Wash's level of economic existence. Another question which might be asked concerns the pertinence of the murder of Milly and the child. The most obvious implication is that Sutpen and his class meet their real defeat at the hands of Wash and the class he typifies. It is a defeat that is embedded in the dependency of the poor white class which the landowners created and failed to maintain. The war does not free Wash from his dependency upon Sutpen, for it does nothing to eradicate the causes of it. Wash, having never been given the opportunity of providing for himself and his family, is still unable to do so. His energies so long diverted



into maintaining Sutpen in that role continue in the same channels, even to the point that he uses his granddaughter as a means of forcing the old obligations upon Sutpen. Sutpen's rejection of Milly and the child is his final abdication of responsibility within the symbolic framework of the story. With this abdication, the social pattern is destroyed, and the aggressive forces within Wash which have been perverted into maintaining the system are released. Once released, these forces find expression in revenge against Sutpen and the society, which have forced Wash into a state of dependency and then have refused to maintain it. Milly also fails Wash, for the heir she might have produced is the last hope of perpetuating Sutpen in his role. Wash murders her and Sutpen's child, however, not only in retribution, but also because once Sutpen is dead and the order has collapsed, Wash himself cannot function; he cannot assume his own obligations, and therefore he and his family are doomed.

The image of Wash carrying a scythe at the end of the story is another symbolic mirroring of doom. As the figure of both Death the Reaper and Father Time, Wash embodies the notion of the passing of an age. The mansion which Sutpen inhabits and the shack in which Wash lives represent the relative economic and social positions of the two men, as well as their personal ambitions. The shack in the slough of the river suggests something primeval, the source and the beginning from which Sutpen works in order to achieve his mastery of the wilderness, but which he abandons once he has established his mansion on the hill. The shack also represents Wash's inability to use these forces. The image of the shack as a dying animal spells out its doom.

Symbolically, the story opens at the shack with the rising of the sun and the birth of a child and closes at sunset with the death of mother and child, the destruction of the building, and the threatened destruction of the forces of society. In the burning of the shack, Wash accomplishes the ritualistic cleansing by fire and the final purification of the land. Thus, in his mirroring of Southern life, Faulkner makes of character, setting,



and this is done ritually with the drinking from the jug, the Holy of Holies is forbidden him. It is not until after the war when Sutpen returns, defeated and stripped of his possessions, that Wash dares to enter the house — and then he enters only under necessity and with the greatest trepidation.

Thus the house becomes a symbol for Wash, signifying something unattainable. It represents not only the economic structure, in which he must either survive by his own efforts to own and control the land or sink to a level beneath that of the slave, but also his frustrations in the psychological establishment of himself in the male role. The only identification he is able to make is with Sutpen, and Sutpen can never recognize him as an equal. The shack which Sutpen allows Wash, in a sense, is a dwelling which Sutpen has abandoned. Wash accepts in a child-like way what is given him, and, irresponsible as a child, he does nothing to maintain or better it. It is what is symbolized by the house that Wash reacts to with violence and anger. But why should Sutpen be the logical victim?

The exact nature of what Wash expected from Sutpen is not made explicit in the story. "But I never expected that, Kernell!" Wash cries. "You know I never. You know how I ain't never expected or asked nothing from ara living man but what I expected from you. And I never asked that. I didn't think hit would need" (p. 548). But Sutpen fails him, and in this failure the fantasy that Wash has created around Sutpen is destroyed, and Wash's world is shattered: "The sun was now up, the swift sun of Mississippi latitudes, and it seemed to him that he stood beneath a strange sky, in a strange scene, familiar only as things are familiar in dreams, like the dreams of falling to one who has never climbed" (p. 544). Having disposed of Sutpen as a God, Wash assumes the role, and the role that he takes is that of the Old Testament God of violence and wrath. He is last shown against the exploding fire as a figure of death and destruction. With brandished scythe, he advances on the waiting men, on the horses and their riders. This image at the end of the story is powerful and significant, tying together the pattern of symbols which has carried meaning.

## ERNEST HEMINGWAY: "IN ANOTHER COUNTRY"

"In Another Country", which was first published in 1926 in the collection *Men Without Women*, is one of Ernest Hemingway's early stories, but it shows his sure hand at rendering symbolic meaning through a finely detailed surface level. The story concerns a group of wounded men who gather together in a hospital to sit at machines designed to rectify their injuries. They do not have much faith in the machines, although the doctors are cheerfully optimistic. The story is told in the first person by one of the men, an American, who is never named. He tells of their experiences in the hospital and their walks from the hospital through the town, whose inhabitants are hostile. The men are friends and stand together against the outsiders, but the narrator feels detached even from his friends because he recognizes in them a bravery which he does not feel. He remains friendly with only one, a boy who has been wounded on his first day at the front and so has not been able to test his bravery. The American has an acquaintance also with an Italian major who does not believe in bravery. They speak together in Italian, and the narrator enjoys the conversations until the major begins to insist that the American speak grammatically, and then Italian becomes a difficult language. One day the major expresses the notion that the machines are nonsensical. He seems disturbed and rails at the narrator because he has not learned his grammar. Then the major questions the youth concerning his future plans. After asking if the American is married and upon learning that he hopes to be, the major says that the youth is a fool, because a man must not marry. Later the major apologizes and states that his own wife has just died. Afterwards the major leaves and does not return to the hospital for three days. When he comes back there are large framed photographs around the walls of all sorts of wounds before and after they had been cured by the machines. In front of the major's machine there are three photographs showing disabled hands like his which are completely restored. But the major does not notice the photographs because he only looks out of the window.

The dominant symbol of the story is that of the wasteland which is built up by carefully detailed imagery. This wasteland is the symbolic microcosm of the world, which is characterized by the cold and dark of a barren land, where men are impotent and isolated. The world is broken down into strata, all of which are part of the dominant symbol and which reflect various levels of detachment. The title of the story is symbolic of these strata and suggests at once the totality of the wasteland while it presents the various levels of the story on which the symbol functions. The other country of the title encompasses the notion of the wasteland where men are frustrated in life and maimed in war, and where they must protect themselves from the hostility of the people in the town where they stay. The hospital is a last refuge, but it offers no real hope or salvation. There is no rapport among the men who gather there. They are detached, not merely from each other, but from life itself.

The story opens with a striking description of a wasteland. The time is fall, the end of the year, symbolically the time of death. The qualities of cold and dark reinforce the idea of barrenness and death, for nothing grows without the warmth of the sun. The image of the dead animals adds to the picture which Hemingway conceives. The chill wind which comes down from the mountains gives these animals some semblance of life, but it is only a semblance and is not real. The wind also blows the small birds, which are alive, but which are contrasted to the larger and stronger animals.

The mood of the story which is set in the opening paragraph is consistent throughout. Never does Hemingway picture the light of day; the men move through the dusk and the dark; they seek artificial light — the light of the windows, the warm light of the cafe, the glow of the coal fire — but the sun which provides a natural warmth and light never appears. In the hospital the men take on the appearance of the animals described in the opening paragraph. They sit by machines which put into motion dead limbs, in the same way that the chill wind gives semblance of life to the dead animals. The mutilated leg of

the narrator is in a machine which operates like a tricycle, attempting to force knee movement, but the leg does not bend. The major sits with his withered hand between two leather straps which bounce up and down and flap the stiff fingers, but the fingers do not move of their own accord. The nature of the injuries is revealing — a mutilated leg, a withered hand, a missing nose. Symbolically, the injuries suggest castration and impotence, reinforcing and extending the wasteland image.

On each level a wasteland is pictured. The major exhorts the young American not to marry, not to enter into the normal relationship with a woman out of which will come a new generation. The major's life illustrates what appears to him the truth of his position. The symbolic situation which makes of him a great fencer shows him as one who clings to the traditions of a culture. His insistence that the American speak grammatically shows again his feelings that discipline and rules can order life. But the major is frustrated by the society in which he lives. Its war withers his hand, and, as though to frustrate him further, the young American has difficulty in speaking when grammatical rules are heeded. Further, in an attempt to order his life and provide maximum security, the major waits until he is out of the army before marrying, but his attempt is again frustrated when his young wife dies. Her death is not anything he could have foreseen, but the symbolic situation clearly foreshadows it. In the wasteland, life cannot be sustained, much less created.

War, which in the past had allowed men the triumph of heroism in personal combat, is mechanized, and men become part of vast war machines which mutilate them and leave them no satisfaction in a job well done. The American has medals which cite him for bravery, but he knows that no personal bravery was involved. The only ones who achieve satisfaction from their war efforts are the three men whom the narrator describes as hunting-hawks. They are the only brave ones, the American feels; but hawks are predatory animals, and though they survive they do so by preying on others.

The town where there is no war has, in fact, a war of its own. It is filled with hostile people who hate the soldiers, who



feel that they must band together in order to walk the streets. Their only real contact with the people is an artificial one, through the "patriotic" cafe girls to whom the soldiers go to seek, at least for a time, warmth and light as a respite from the cold and dark outside.

The hospital to which the soldiers make daily visits is located on what is virtually an island, since canals separate it from the rest of the town. The soldiers seek a certain bridge: "There was a choice of three bridges. On one of them a woman sold roasted chestnuts. It was warm standing in front of her charcoal fire, and the chestnuts were warm afterward in your pocket."<sup>13</sup> The entrance to the hospital is across a courtyard where death is often present since there were usually funerals starting there. In the hospital the soldiers sit at machines which offer them hope, slight as it may be. They do not really believe in the machines, but they do not miss a day because the machines offer the only hope they have and they seek it, as they seek the warmth of the cafes and the coal fire. It is the irony of the wasteland that from one set of machines, those used in the war, they received their injuries, and from another set, those used in the hospital, they hope to cure their ills.

The detachment of the men is complete. They are removed from the war, which "we did not go to any more"; from the town, where "we felt held together by there being something that had happened that they, the people who disliked us, did not understand"; and even from each other: "We were all a little detached, and there was nothing that held us together except that we met every afternoon at the hospital" (pp. 53, 55). This detachment is symbolic not only of the physical condition of man in the wasteland but also of a spiritual impotence which results from his living in a world which has no order, purpose, or direction.

<sup>13</sup> *Men Without Women* (1946), p. 53. Citations are to this edition.



## SHERWOOD ANDERSON: "DEATH IN THE WOODS"

Sherwood Anderson's "Death in the Woods" is, as Irving Howe notes, "bare as a winter tree", but "marvelously rich in substance",<sup>14</sup> for beneath the surface level of narration and by means of a pattern of symbols Anderson ponders the ultimate reality of life and death. The narrator of the story is a man, but he recounts past experiences, some of which have taken place when he was a boy. The tale which he tells is a simple one concerning an old woman who lives in poverty with her husband and son on a farm near the town in which the narrator lived. In her youth she is a servant girl, bound to a German farmer, whom Jake Grimes has to fight in order to carry her away. She bears Jake two children, a son and a daughter, but the daughter dies. Jake and the son treat her cruelly and make little effort to keep the farm in operation. The burden of feeding the inhabitants of the place falls on the woman. "How was she going to get everything fed? — that was her problem."<sup>15</sup> One day in the winter the woman, carrying a few eggs to trade, goes off to town. Her walk is difficult because the snow is heavy and for the past few days she has not been feeling well. She carries with her an old grain bag in which she plans to put the gains of her barter. Because she has a successful trade, her grain bag is heavy, and on her way home she stops to strap it to her back. When she comes to a clearing she sits down to rest and falls asleep. The dogs, which have accompanied her, leave to hunt rabbits in the woods. After a while the dogs, joined by some others, come back to the clearing. The night is cold and clear, and there is a moon. The dogs begin to run in circles around the clearing. Now and then one of them leaves the circle and comes to stand in front of the old woman. When the woman dies, the dogs gather around her and rip the pack from her back, tearing her dress along with it, but not touching her. When she is found her body is frozen stiff, "and the shoulders

<sup>14</sup> Anderson (1951), p. 165.

<sup>15</sup> *Ten Modern Masters: An Anthology of the Short Story*, ed. Robert Gorham Davis (1953), p. 27. Citations are to this edition.

were so narrow and the body so slight that in death it looked like the body of some charming young girl" (p. 31). The narrator accompanies a group of men into the forest, and when he sees the body he trembles "with some mystical feeling" (p. 32). The scene in the forest, the narrator says, "had become for me, without my knowing it, the foundation for the real story I am now trying to tell". But the fragments of the story, the narrator says, have to be picked up slowly and "long afterwards" (p. 33).

The narrator's place in the story must be carefully examined, for, as he suggests, the simple story of the old woman's experience is not the "real story" which he is trying to tell. Not to examine the position of the narrator and to consider it as part of the total meaning of the story is to fall into a misreading and perhaps to suggest, as Howe does, that a "clumsiness in perspective which forces the narrator to offer a weak explanation of how he could have known the precise circumstances of the old woman's death" is the story's one "significant flaw".<sup>16</sup> The narrator offers the key to a symbolic reading which makes of the old woman's experiences a surface beneath which lies a deeper meaning which has significance to all mankind. "The whole thing, the story of the old woman's death, was to me as I grew older like music heard from far off. The notes had to be picked up slowly one at a time. Something had to be understood" (p. 34).

The narrator recreates the story of the woman's life and death by drawing parallels from his own experiences to add to the meager facts that he remembers from his youth. He speaks in general terms of old women who are like the one in his tale. From his knowledge concerning this type of old woman, the narrator constructs his description of the life and circumstances of the woman in his story. Further, he recreates the feelings and the situation at the home of the German farmer by paralleling them with his own experiences: "Things happened. When I was a young man I worked on the farm of a German. . . . I saw things at that place" (p. 33). In the same way the narrator

<sup>16</sup> Howe, p. 167.

recounts the facts of the old woman's death: "I knew all about it afterward. . . . I saw a pack of dogs act just like that" (p. 30). Throughout the story the narrator is concerned with how he has managed to locate the information which he needs in order to tell the story. There is a mystery about his recollection. "I wonder how I know all this", he says. "It must have stuck in my mind from small-town tales when I was a boy" (p. 25). Even when he has related the story he insists that there is a mystical quality attached to the events, something beyond understanding.

The narrator's emphasis on the mystical quality of the experience and on his efforts to draw details and feelings from what is, in a sense, his own subconscious memory forces the reader to look beyond the details of the story in order to locate what the narrator feels is its ultimate mystery. The compelling mood which springs from the narrator's use of the depths of his own memory suggests the remoteness of a past far beyond the dawn of civilization. The old woman seems to spring from an unknown past and to be unknown and unrecognized by other people — although her kind is universal — "All country and small-town people have seen such an old woman" (p. 23). "People drive right down a road and never notice an old woman like that" (p. 24). The suggestion of a remote past is further reinforced when the narrator makes a strong point of the primitive instinctual behavior of the dogs which "may have been a kind of death ceremony" (p. 30).

This notion of a prehistoric past is strengthened by the parallels between certain events of the story and the system of taboos by which men lived before they had advanced to the point of creating myths and religions. In those times men attempted to control their lives and protect themselves from death by an elaborate set of taboos. Fear of death and of the unknown is uppermost in these taboos. For this reason a group of men adopted a totem animal in order to secure protection. In return for this security members of that totem were forbidden to eat or in any way to molest the totem animal. In "Death in the Woods" a parallel situation exists. Although the Grimes family live in a state of poverty, they keep dogs which they

feed to the best of their ability and at their own expense in contrast to the other animals on the farm — the horses, the pigs, the cow, the chickens — which in some way provide food or service for the family. In prehistoric times members of a totem clan would don skins of their totem animal in their ritualistic dances in order to procure the necessary magic to ward off death and starvation. In "Death in the Woods" the ritual performed by the dogs around the dying woman suggests regression to the depths of early times when men perhaps would have covered themselves with skins and danced in order to frighten away the evil spirit of death.

Another such taboo was the one against a man's marrying a woman of the same tribe, which made it necessary for men to go to other totem groups to take their women by force — in the same way, perhaps, as Jake Grimes does when he fights the German farmer for the girl and rides off with her. Related to this taboo is the ancient one against a man's marrying a virgin, a taboo which connects virginity with blood and death and forbids a man to marry a girl who has not had previous sexual relationships. The vestiges of this belief can be seen, perhaps, in Jake's indifference concerning the virginity of the girl he marries.

In ancient times fear of death extended to the dead body itself. To touch the body was forbidden. The taboo even covered the utterances of the dead one's name. These old, long-forgotten prohibitions are suggested by the behavior of the hunter who discovers the body and of the men who follow him to the forest. "A hunter . . . found the old woman's body and did not touch it" (p. 31). "As a matter of fact, the hunter had not looked closely at the body. He had been frightened" (p. 32). "No woman had come with the party from town; but one of the men . . . took off his overcoat and spread it over her. Then he gathered her into his arms and started off to town, all the others following silently. At that time no one knew who she was" (p. 33).

These symbolic actions mirror not only men's earliest attempts to understand and control life and death, but also the more sophisticated ones of classical civilizations. One of the



few myths in which the clarity of the Greek genius is crossed by the shadow and mystery of death is the Demeter-Persephone story which personifies the reality of life in death.

Persephone, the daughter of Demeter, is surprised by Pluto and carried off by force to his underground realm of Hades. Grief-stricken, Demeter roams the earth in search of her daughter until a river nymph shows her Persephone's girdle and tells her that she has seen the earth open and swallow Persephone. Demeter, blaming her loss on the earth, causes it to be barren, so that nothing but thistles and brambles grow and the cattle die. The nymph intercedes, telling Demeter that the earth had opened unwillingly and that Persephone is in Hades, sad, but no longer frightened. She has become the bride of Erebus and Queen of the Dead. Upon learning this, Demeter hastens to Zeus. At his intercession Persephone is allowed to return to earth for six months of the year, but must spend the other half of the year underground in Hades.<sup>17</sup>

There can be little doubt, Bulfinch notes, that this story of Demeter and Persephone is an allegory: "Proserpine signifies the seed-corn which when cast into the ground lies there concealed — that is, she is carried off by the god of the underworld. It reappears — that is, Persephone is restored to her mother."<sup>18</sup> There also can be little doubt, when we trace it back, that the origins of the myth are in the familiar aspects of nature — the gloom and decay of autumn and the brightness and verdure of spring.<sup>19</sup>

Closely allied to Demeter and Persephone is Hecate, goddess of the moon and of death. In art, Hecate is often portrayed as having three bodies, three heads, and six arms, signifying a Demeter-Persephone-Hecate trilogy. Around this complex of myths grew up one of the most solemn of all Greek religions, the Eleusinian mysteries. The rituals of the cult were a closely guarded secret and were never revealed, but it is supposed that

<sup>17</sup> Summarized from *Bulfinch's Mythology* (Modern Library, n.d.), pp. 47-51.

<sup>18</sup> Bulfinch, p. 51.

<sup>19</sup> James George Frazer, *The New Golden Bough*, ed. Theodor H. Gaster (1959), p. 366.



the culmination of the rites came in a revelation involving the sprouting corn.<sup>20</sup> This revelation was accomplished in awed silence and with an unparalleled solemnity. It was a mystical experience never to be forgotten, disclosing as it did that Demeter and Persephone were one. Incorporated in the idea of the single entity of the old mother and the young maiden is the belief that life and death are related in the same way.<sup>21</sup> Demeter, goddess of grains, is called the great mother and the great nourisher, but in her Persephone form she is worshipped as the goddess of death. Jung and Kerényi comment on this relationship: "The all embracing idea of birth, of the everlastingly repeated beginning of life, united mother, daughter and child in a single unit pregnant with meaning. The meaning of birth is not the beginning of all things, not the unique, the original beginning, but *continuity* in an uninterrupted sequence of birth."<sup>22</sup>

The major symbolism of "Death in the Woods" centers around this myth. The woman is easily identified in her Demeter role not only by the grain sack which she carries but also by her symbolic function as nourisher:

The woman who died was one destined to feed animal life. Anyway that is all she ever did. She was feeding animal life before she was born, as a child, as a young woman working on the farm of the German, after she married, when she grew old and when she died. She fed animal life in cows, in chickens, in pigs, in horses, in dogs, in men. . . . On the night when she died she was hurrying homeward, bearing on her body food for animal life. (p. 34)

The figure of Persephone can be identified with the young woman who, on a June day at the wheat harvest, is carried away by Jake Grimes in a horse and buggy amid much violence — just as Persephone was carried off at the same time of year by Pluto in his horse-drawn chariot. In the person of Jake Grimes are the characteristics which made Pluto one of the most un-

<sup>20</sup> Frazer, p. 359.

<sup>21</sup> C. G. Jung and C. Kerényi, *Essays on a Science of Mythology* (1949), pp. 151-152.

<sup>22</sup> Jung and Kerényi, p. 199.

popular of gods. Although people worshipped Pluto, it was out of fear; and when they offered their sacrifices, they did so with averted faces. Anderson makes the point neatly when the narrator describes the time that Jake Grimes tries to join a group of men who are loafing at a livery-barn. The men pay Jake no attention and no one speaks to him.

The identification of the old woman with Hecate is also accomplished deftly. As the old woman dies the moon comes out, and in an unearthly atmosphere the dogs howl. From these circumstances emerges the ancient figure of Hecate, goddess of the moon and of witches, whose presence was always announced by the howling of dogs, as she roamed through the night in company with dead souls. Hecate symbolizes the essential female governed by the moon; the sowing of the seed and the reaping of the harvest are determined by phases of the moon. In her worship are combined the elemental forces of life and the inevitability of death.

The figure of the old woman, then, combines the ideas symbolized by the Demeter-Persephone-Hecate trilogy, and it is to this that the young boy responds in the forest clearing. He might have been a celebrant of the Eleusinian mysteries at the revelation of the identity of mother and maiden: "She did not look old, lying there in the light, frozen and still. One of the men turned her over in the snow and I saw everything. My body trembled with some strange mystical feeling" (p. 32). The revelation of the beautiful girlish body of the old woman fills the boy with wonder and awe. The aura of mystery and beauty prevails; and, as he grows older, the experience is like music heard from afar. But, still, there is something to be understood, and from his attempts at understanding comes the meaning of the story. As a boy he has not been able to understand; as a man he feels compelled to tell the story in the hope of understanding, but he remains dissatisfied.

From the earliest times, men, in their efforts to understand the mysteries of life and death, have been impelled to create myths. But, while the myths are beautiful and comforting, they do not adequately explain basic questions, and as long as there

is no explanation, men will continue to create their stories of rebirth and regeneration — as the narrator does in this story through his tale of the life and death of a woman and as Anderson does through the structure of symbols which relate the narrator's tale to other attempts by men to understand.

#### EUDORA WELTY: "PETRIFIED MAN"

"Petrified Man" by Eudora Welty was published in 1941 in the collection *A Curtain of Green*. In the introduction to the volume Katherine Anne Porter describes the story as "a fine clinical study of vulgarity — vulgarity absolute, chemically pure, exposed mercilessly to its final subhuman depths".<sup>23</sup> But Miss Porter does not see in the story the richness of theme which she prefers and for which she praises other stories in the collection, "where external act and the internal voiceless life of the human imagination almost meet and mingle" (p. xxi). I should like to suggest, however, that "Petrified Man" is really more like the kind of story Miss Porter prefers and not wholly the kind she describes. The surface level of realism is there, it is true, but symbols act beneath the surface to provide a richness of meaning. Characters, setting, and action fuse to form a coherent symbolic structure by means of which Welty questions the reasons for the behavior of her characters, and the story becomes not simply a study in vulgarity, but also an indictment of the social and psychological forces which produce it.

The immediate setting of the story is a beauty parlor, where the operator, Leota, is in conversation with her ten o'clock customer, Mrs. Fletcher. Their words to each other are polite, but beneath the aspect of civility there is a certain viciousness which is expressed immediately when Mrs. Fletcher comments on the stale peanuts in Leota's purse. Leota explains that they have been given her by her friend, Mrs. Pike. Later, however, Leota retaliates with the comment that Mrs. Fletcher's hair is

<sup>23</sup> *A Curtain of Green and Other Stories* (1941), pp. xx-xxi. Citations are to this edition.

falling out. Mrs. Fletcher attempts to excuse her falling hair, but Leota is relentless and reveals the purpose behind her apparently harmless question — that she has heard that Mrs. Fletcher is pregnant, “and lots of times that’ll make your hair do awful funny” (p. 34). Mrs. Fletcher’s reaction is immediate as she attempts to find out who has revealed her condition. She is, however, skillfully maneuvered into a position where she admits that she is pregnant.

At this point a small boy who has been playing unnoticed on the floor makes his presence known, and Leota, explaining that the child belongs to Mrs. Pike, uses him as a means of changing the subject. But Mrs. Fletcher will not be mollified. She continues to brood over her condition and the woman who she feels has betrayed her. Finally Leota confesses that Mrs. Pike is the culprit. Then, as she does before, Leota hastens to change the subject by talking about a freak show that she and Mrs. Pike have seen. Later, Leota introduces the subject of pregnancy again by commenting on the twins in a bottle which she has seen: “Born joined plumb together — dead a course” (pp. 39-40).

Continuing to describe her visit to the show, Leota tells Mrs. Fletcher about the pygmies, of whom Mrs. Pike is especially fond. “Just suppose it was your husband!” Leota comments to Mrs. Fletcher, who immediately defends her husband’s stature and wants to know what Mrs. Pike sees in the pygmies (p. 40). Leota evades the question and starts talking about the petrified man, saying, “that ever’thing since he was nine years old, when it goes through his digestion, see, somehow Mrs. Pike says it goes to his joints and has been turning to stone” (p. 41). Leota continues: “How’d you like to be married to a guy like that?” (p. 42). Mrs. Fletcher defends her husband again: “Mr. Fletcher takes bending exercises every night of the world. I make him” (p. 42). The battle continues in this way until Leota finishes and Mrs. Fletcher leaves.

A week later Mrs. Fletcher is on time for her appointment and once again talking with Leota, who, this time, has changed her opinion about Mrs. Pike. It seems that Mrs. Pike has been



reading in one of Leota's magazines and has noticed that a man, a Mr. Petrie, wanted for the rape of four women, is the petrified man of the freak show. Mrs. Pike had known the man while she was staying in New Orleans. Leota is angry because Mrs. Pike has received the five hundred dollars reward, which in Leota's words comes to "a hunderd an' twenty-five bucks" per woman (p. 54). At this moment in their conversation both women notice that Billy is on the floor eating the stale peanuts which have been in Leota's purse. The women are extremely angry. Mrs. Fletcher grabs the child, and Leota spansks him. Afterwards, Billy stomps through the group of wild-haired women who have gathered to watch and flings back the words: "If you're so smart, why ain't you rich?" (p. 55).

As in the stories previously discussed the author skillfully directs attention to a subsurface where characters, setting, and action, seen as symbols, present the real situation and the unconscious drives and feelings of the people portrayed. The women's world, the beauty parlor, becomes the microcosm of a society where men are relegated to subordinate positions. The striking figure of the petrified man is the symbolic embodiment of their ineffectuality. It is obvious that in the household of the Fletchers, Mrs. Fletcher occupies the dominant role. "Mr. Fletcher can't do a thing with me", she proclaims: "No siree, he can't. If he so much as raises his voice against me, he knows good and well I'll have one of my sick headaches, and then I'm just not fit to live with" (p. 37). "Women have to stand up for themselves", she continues, "or there's just no telling". She insists, however, that she asks Mr. Fletcher's advice once in a while, "especially on something important, like is it time for a permanent". But he abrogates even this responsibility by telling her to ask the advice of the beauty operators.

Leota's husband, Fred, and Mrs. Pike's husband, Canfield, are both unemployed. "All Fred does", Leota says, "is lay around the house like a rug. I wouldn't be surprised if he woke up some day and couldn't move" (p. 42). Leota never asks Fred's advice. She doesn't feel he is capable of making a correct decision.



Another symbolic situation which reflects the rejection of men in the woman's world is the one recounted by Leota concerning the woman who came for a "shampoo and set" while on her way to the hospital to have a baby: "See, her husband was waitin' outside in the car, and her bags was all packed an' in the back seat, and she was all ready, 'cept she wanted her shampoo an' set. And havin' one pain right after another. Her husband kep' comin' in here, scared-like, but couldn't do nothin' with her a course" (p. 47).

The child, Billy, is a further symbolic representation of men in the women's world. His mother, Mrs. Pike, has tried bringing him to work with her in a millinery shop where he spends his days trying on the women's hats, but the employer objects, so Leota brings him to the beauty parlor instead, where he spends his days playing on the floor beneath the feet of the women. His playthings are hair clips, and he does small errands such as getting fresh towels when Leota needs them.

The women's reactions to the pigmies and to the petrified man are other indications of their feelings toward men. The women like the pigmies, who are described as though they are children. In the women's minds the pigmies are symbolic of their husbands, who are childlike in their dependence upon their wives for support or who have abrogated other responsibilities. Thus the pigmies, because they are seen as children, are accepted by the women in the same way that they accept the child, Billy, and allow him to play on the floor.

The women are both fascinated and repelled by the petrified man, who is symbolic of all the men portrayed in the story. His masquerade is a protective device, just as passivity in a man serves as a disguise for the aggressive male tendencies which have not been allowed expression. The symbol is given universal significance in the story by means of the name of the rapist, Petrie, a name whose letters make use of the first five letters in the word *petrified*. The masquerade that he assumes is a cover of white powder similar to the powder that covers the cigarettes in Leota's purse.

Child-bearing is the chief biological function of women, but

in this women's world, the women reject the notion and look upon pregnancy as something that has been forced upon them and which they cannot escape. Their attitude is one of resentment toward the men who cause them this condition and toward the condition itself. When they speak of pregnancy, they spell and abbreviate it, as though it were a dirty word. Leota's feelings concerning childbirth are reflected in her description of the malformed twins whom she has seen in the side show. Child-bearing in her mind is shown to be something abnormal and ugly. "Aw. Well, honey, talkin' about bein' pregnant an' all, you ought to see those twins in a bottle, you really owe it to yourself" (p. 39).

The women's world is symbolized in the beauty parlor. It is a world of pretension and artificiality — false as the hennaed and bleached hair and the plucked eyebrows of the women who frequent it. It is a sordid world, cluttered like Leota's purse full of loose powder, stale peanuts, and powder-covered cigarettes. It is a dirty world, as soiled as the basket of used towels into which Leota flicks ashes. It is an improverished world, as poor as Leota, who works from early morning until late night, never having time to eat a meal, and as the women who have had to meet their men and be courted in rental libraries, trains and automobiles. It is a world as destitute of value as is the ignorance and vulgarity of the women within it. It is an entirely materialistic world where everything is measured in terms of its money value.

And the women's world is a hostile world, for within it is waged all the conflict which results from the antagonism the women feel, an antagonism which is directed not only against their men but also against each other. For in eschewing their own role and in attempting to take the role of the men they are left without an identity of their own. They have no real place in the society which, paradoxically, they control, because the place that they have usurped is unnatural to them. The values of the society which the women accept are the values of the male — size and power. There is little or no recognition of the qualities that are considered to be essentially feminine, the crea-

tive and nurturing instincts that are based on a gentleness, passivity, and pliancy which the women generally scorn. Thus, accepting the male values and rejecting the female ones, the women in the story take an unnatural position, and they vent upon the men and upon each other a hostility which arises from their uncomfortable role.

There is between Leota and Mrs. Fletcher a spiteful battle, waged almost continuously. This battle is more significant in that it is not a personal fight, since, in reality, Mrs. Fletcher is no more to Leota than a ten o'clock customer. The battle goes on and on. At one point Mrs. Fletcher nods her head so as to destroy a ringlet which Leota has been working on, and later Mrs. Fletcher lets the swinging door fly back against Leota. At another point Leota almost chokes Mrs. Fletcher with a cloth that she is pinning around her neck, and later Leota jerks Mrs. Fletcher up by the back locks of her hair so that her scalp hurts all over. The battle continues until at the end the women unite in an attack upon Mrs. Pike through her son, Billy.

Both women reveal very childlike emotional attitudes toward Mrs. Pike — Leota by her unquestioning belief in everything Mrs. Pike tells her and Mrs. Fletcher by her immediate feelings of anger and resentment toward a woman she does not even know. "Mrs. Pike says" is the preface to most of Leota's statements: she drinks the beer that Mrs. Pike tells her is best; she asks the fortune teller the questions that Mrs. Pike suggests. Even after Leota feels angry and betrayed by her, Mrs. Pike still remains an authority, although Leota now obeys with resentment. Mrs. Fletcher not only feels betrayed by Mrs. Pike's revelation of her pregnancy, but, in a sense, blames her for it. Like Leota, Mrs. Fletcher seems obsessed by Mrs. Pike. Constantly questioning Leota about Mrs. Pike, Mrs. Fletcher is always directing the conversation to a point where she is able to voice her resentment and hostile feelings.

Leota's reversal of feeling toward Mrs. Pike is significant because it is irrational. All of Leota's former feelings of friendship vanish when Mrs. Pike claims the reward. Leota feels betrayed. At first she has been willing not only to show Mrs. Pike

ordinary little courtesies of friendship, but she has also made it possible for Mrs. Pike to work by taking Billy into the beauty parlor. But when Mrs. Pike, by means of the money, achieves independence and makes immediate plans to leave, Leota feels rejected, bitter, and hostile. There is no longer any basis for friendship, and at the end of the story Leota and Mrs. Fletcher are in agreement for once as they join in expressing their anger against Mrs. Pike by their attack on Billy.

This attack is also an expression of their hostility toward each other and toward their men. Billy, symbolically attempting to assert his own male role by invading Leota's purse and by carrying off and eating the peanuts, is caught, and both women act immediately to squelch his assertion.

Toward the men whom they plainly dominate and control the women openly display their scorn and hostility. Not so openly expressed, however, is their essential envy of the men. It is subtly suggested in the way the women react to the men in the side show — the pigmies whose reduced size seems to delight them; the petrified man, whose inertia seems to fascinate them. The basis for this envy is revealed by Leota's question: "How'd you like to be married to a guy like that?" Mrs. Fletcher's quick defense of her husband manifests her preoccupation with both his size and capabilities. It is this envy and jealousy that generates the hostile domineering qualities of the women, and the problem thus created goes deeper than a sociological one, confined to a particular place at a certain time, for the problem that Welty presents is a universal struggle that is settled only when the society or the individual within the society can reconcile the conflict. There is no reconciliation in "Petrified Man", for the society which Welty describes does not accept legitimate feminine needs, and as long as it does not, as long as women continue to deny them, the frustration will continue. It is only when the women have assumed attitudes and positions that are not rightfully theirs that they are vulnerable, when Billy's question couched in terms of the materialistic society — "If you're so smart, why ain't you rich?" — exposes their shabby pretences and embodies the total meaning of their frustrated lives.

## VI

### THE SHORT STORY AND THE SIMPLE NARRATIVE

If the short stories discussed in the last chapter are taken to be representative, it is clear that striking similarities in structure exist. Each author makes use of symbols embodied in the surface level to point to a reality beyond the facts of the extensional world. The short stories which these authors write seem specifically devised to allow them to question the world of appearances. In their stories, they can be said to be symbolists, making use of a device which is particularly appropriate to their artistic aims. By means of the symbol they are able to suggest identifications at the same time that they question meanings. They are thus able to put into concrete terms relationships which lie beyond the surface level of narration. What they question is embodied in the structure of their stories; that is, the use of certain symbols in a particular pattern necessarily directs the kinds of questions asked. They give content to the questions. Different short stories, making use of different symbols, ask different questions. But the technique in each story is essentially the same: each author makes use of a literal level of narration which functions to embody the symbols.

To say that the short story can be characterized by questions embodied in symbols is not to suggest that all short stories are so similar in structure that the pattern of narration in each is exactly the same. Such is not the case. Each author uses certain devices peculiar to him. The facts which make up the exterior level of narration are in each story different. Although in each story character, setting, and action must be recognized as symbols, sometimes their particular use is different. In the stories



I have analyzed, Hawthorne, Conrad, and Faulkner use many symbols to form a pattern from which meaning is derived. Mansfield and Lawrence make use of a dominant symbol which encompasses other subsidiary symbols. Welty uses both a dominant symbol and a separate pattern of other symbols.

I pointed out earlier that sampling is important and conclusions necessarily tentative. The validity of conclusions rests in part on the validity of the sampling. It might be objected, I am aware, that I construct a definition to fit my sampling and that there is a whole group of stories in which symbols do not function. Ray B. West has examined such a group that he calls realistic as opposed to others he calls symbolic,<sup>1</sup> but I would like to make another distinction, positing an entirely separate category.

It seems to me that there are short stories and there are simple narratives.<sup>2</sup> The simple narrative exhibits all the characteristics commonly taken to be descriptive of the genre, but the total interest lies on the surface level. There are no mysteries to be solved, no depths to be plumbed. Not only does the structure of the simple narrative differ from the structure of the short story, but the effect on the reader is also different. The simple narrative gives an immediate feeling of satisfaction; the meaning is apparent, and the theme can be easily stated. The short story, on the other hand, leaves the reader with a set of emotions that cannot be easily sorted; he is often confused as to meaning, and he finds it almost impossible to state the theme in a sentence or two; his satisfaction must be postponed until

<sup>1</sup> *The Short Story in America: 1900-1950* (1952). The term "realistic" seems to me to be somewhat inappropriate. What could be more realistic than the surface level of "Petrified Man", for example?

<sup>2</sup> The point must be made that I do not use the term "simple narrative" pejoratively. I mean simply to name a category, recognition of which will make the business of critical judgment easier and more valid. I recognize that the word "simple" has unfortunate connotations, but I think that the analyses I make in this chapter reveal my admiration for the form and for the skill the authors demonstrate in constructing it. The term is descriptive. The form is simpler. Structure and meaning are less complex. Value judgment concerning the relative merit of different genres is valid but is a problem outside of the scope of this study.

he has answered the questions presented to him by means of the symbolic structure of the story. The short story makes of the reader a co-creator, and his satisfaction ultimately rests in this.

An examination of a group of stories which seem to me to belong in the category of the simple narrative will make clear the distinction between the simple narrative and the short story. In every case it must be admitted that the simple narratives form a totality, that they are characterized by a unity of effect, that they partake of the qualities of brevity, closeness of texture, and freedom from excrescence. The only difference lies in their lack of a symbolic structure.

Let us consider, for example, the justly famous narrative by Somerset Maugham, "The Colonel's Lady". In this story Maugham presents an account of Colonel George Peregrine's response to his belief that his wife, Evie, has committed adultery. Peregrine is a stereotype, but not a symbol. He is a man's man, a sturdy Englishman, whose interests, clearly stated at the beginning of the narrative, both define his character and explain his response. He is a country gentleman, a public spirited man, who looks upon it as his duty to see to the welfare of the people on the estate. All he asks of the recipients of his bounty is that at elections they vote for his candidate. The rather gentle ironic tone of the omniscient narrator makes clear to the reader the kind of man the colonel is. He is upset because he has no son and heir and he feels that his wife is to blame. According to the colonel, Evie is plain, drab, thin as a rail, the sort of woman one simply does not notice.

The plot movement begins when the colonel discovers that his wife has written a book of poetry. He is inclined at first to disregard it. The poems included in the volume are not much like the poetry he remembers from his school years. Being somewhat in a hurry and not having had much experience in the reading of poetry, the colonel pays little attention to the poems, but he tells his wife he has read them and asks how much it has cost to have the book printed. Evie's answer that a publisher took it is the first indication that the colonel's wife is surely different from his conception of her.

Colonel Peregrine makes a visit to London and there is involved in a series of experiences which cause him some concern. First, Daphne, the colonel's girl friend, questions him about reports that she has heard that the poems are "hot stuff" and selling like "hot cakes". At first the colonel pays no attention. Indeed, he believes that someone has been pulling Daphne's leg. Next he meets a critic who comments on the book saying that passion throbs in every line. Thinking that the critic is a damned fool, the colonel leaves, but when he gets home, he looks for Evie's book and is unable to find it.

About a week later he meets the Duke of Haverel and learns that Evie has refused an invitation for a weekend. Since the colonel has desired to know the Duke better he is angered, until he realizes that only Evie has been asked. Later he accompanies Evie to a cocktail party given by the publishers of the book. There he is introduced to everyone as "Colonel Peregrine, E. K. Hamilton's husband, you know".<sup>3</sup> The men do not have anything to say to him, but the women gush.

Events cause Colonel Peregrine to do some thinking which leads him to go to newspapers and magazines for reviews. He finds they are extremely favorable. Then he goes to a bookstore, where the clerk gives him further information. The book is now in a fifth edition; it contains a story, "Sexy, you know, but tragic" (p. 233). The clerk also suggests that the poet was inspired by a personal experience.

Finally the colonel reads the book and finds it to contain a story of a love affair between a woman past her youth and a young man. During the climax of the affair the love songs of the woman praise the young and virile body of her lover. The colonel flushes when he reads these poems. After reading the volume, the colonel is convinced that the poems relate Evie's own story. He is convinced that she has had a lover and that her lover has died. But he is amazed. He finds it inconceivable that Evie should have had a love affair and a passionate one at that. When he meets Evie again she is untroubled; there is no

<sup>3</sup> C. L. Cline, *The Rinehart Book of Short Stories* (1958), p. 231. Citations are to this edition.

look of guilt; she makes the same casual remarks he is accustomed to.

Three days later he goes to his lawyer who advises him to forget the whole thing. Two remarks made by Colonel Peregrine at this interview sum up his response:

"It's so rotten not to know what sort of chap he was. One can't even tell if he was by way of being a gentleman. I mean, for all I know he may have been a farmhand or a clerk in a lawyer's office." (p. 239)

"I'll take your advice. I'll do nothing. Let them think me a damned fool and to hell with them. The truth is, I don't know what I'd do without Evie. But I'll tell you what, there's one thing I shall never understand till my dying day: What in the name of heaven did the fellow ever see in her?" (p. 241)

The entire story actually functions to characterize the colonel. Evie is seen only through the eyes of her husband. What she actually is, is of no real consequence nor is the one unanswered question in the story. Did Evie write autobiographically? It is clear that whether she did or not there is more to the character of his wife than George ever sees or is capable of seeing. The point is made implicitly by the omniscient narrator, who often enters into the mind of the protagonist. Irony is achieved through this juxtaposition of viewpoints. First the reader is allowed to see what the colonel thinks his wife is. Then the reader is made aware of the extent of George's misunderstanding. The tone of the story is ironic and everything in the story functions to further the ironic commentary. By no stretch of the imagination could either the situation, the action, or the characters be taken as symbols.

Another often anthologized piece of short fiction which surely takes the form of the simple narrative is Dorothy Parker's "The Sexes". The characters are two: a young man with a "scenic cravat" and a girl in a "fringed dress".<sup>4</sup> This is the extent of the description. The situation is a simple one. The young man is visiting the girl in her home. At the beginning of the story it is

<sup>4</sup> *The Indispensable Dorothy Parker*, ed. W. Somerset Maugham (1951), p. 47. Citations are to this edition.



evident that there is a considerable amount of tension. In two neat sentences, the author sets the stage for the battle to follow: "She was examining her handkerchief; it might have been the first one of its kind she had seen, so deep was her interest in its material, form, and possibilities. The young man cleared his throat, producing a small, syncopated noise" (p. 47). In these two sentences are expressed the positions that the two have assumed. She is withdrawn, but obviously not forbidding. He is nervous but assumes the lead, and they move toward the first skirmish. He offers her a cigarette which she refuses. He apologizes that he does not have her brand and offers to go and get some. During this interchange her attitude is syrupy sweet. In six sentences she thanks him five times. Her strategy is effective. He explodes: "Will you for God's sake stop thanking me?" (p. 47). The battle continues, she on the attack, he on the defensive, apologizing at every turn. Finally he puts the specific question: "Would you rather I'd go?" Her answer takes two directions. First, she switches the terms of his question: "Please do whatever *you* like." But it is obvious that she does not want him to go, and for the first time she comes directly to what is bothering her: "Why don't you go up to Florence Leaming's?" Now he has a clue and he begins the reassurance: "She gives me a pain" (p. 50).

In this story Miss Parker is at her consummate best. There is not a line that is ill-used, not a word that does not in some way forward the action. A strictly objective point of view is maintained which presents both the participants in the battle and the battle itself. The young man and the young woman are typical representatives of their sex, not stereotypes in the same way that Colonel Peregrine is a stereotype, but certainly not symbols either. They are simply what they are. The reader is not expected to conjecture concerning possibilities. There are no questionings, no symbolic situations to be explored. Although the theme of the story is an expression of the typical battle lines drawn in arguments between the sexes, it is symbolic only in so far as it is universal, something that can be said of most themes in literature.



Many of the stories of Guy de Maupassant also fall into the classification of the simple narrative. A good example is the well-known "The Jewels". This story is similar in structure to "The Colonel's Lady", consisting of a series of ironic contrasts, carefully built up until a climax is reached. M. Lantin counts himself lucky to have won for a wife a young woman whose "unassuming beauty had a charm of angelic modesty", and whose "imperceptible smile which never left her lips seemed to be a reflection of the purity of her heart".<sup>5</sup> Everyone sings her praises: "Happy will be the man who wins her. He could never find a better wife" (p. 197). And M. Lantin is happy. She manages his meager salary in such a way that they seem to live in luxury. She lavishes caresses on her husband and keeps herself attractive. He finds only two faults with her: her love for the theater and her fondness for imitation jewelry. At first he tries to go to the theater with her; then he begs her to go without him. When he admonishes her concerning her fondness for imitation jewels, she smiles at him and says gently, "They are my vice" (p. 198). In more ways than one, of course, the jewels are her vice, and after her death her husband learns that they are, indeed, real.

The author accomplishes the fact of her death in a single paragraph containing three sentences. Nothing that has come previously prepares the reader for the event, but it is not, therefore, lacking in credibility. It is simply a fact which marks the turning point in the structure of the story. There is no sympathy for the wife or, at this point, for the husband, because Maupassant has provided for none.

After her death M. Lantin is thrown into terrible despair. Three short paragraphs describe his grief. But again the reader is not allowed to sympathize because shortly thereafter Maupassant begins the juxtaposition of events which are the basis for the comic contrast. The reader begins to suspect the virtue of M. Lantin's late wife. But M. Lantin does not suspect until, pushed because of poverty to offer for sale a piece of his wife's

<sup>5</sup> K. L. Knickerbocker and H. Willard Reninger, *Interpreting Literature* (1960), p. 197. Citations are to this edition.

numerous jewels, he finds that it is worth not the six or eight francs he thought to receive but rather twenty-five thousand. When the thought occurs to him that not only this piece but the others must have been gifts, he faints, regains consciousness and weeps. But again, the reader is not allowed to feel sympathy for the man betrayed, because the next morning M. Lantin offers the other jewels for sale, even going so far as to haggle with the jeweler over prices. With 196,000 francs M. Lantin leaves the jeweler and in high good spirits dines at an expensive restaurant. Finished, he hails a cab, and as he rides he wants to call out, "I, too, am rich. I have 200,000 francs." He goes to his office and resigns saying that he has inherited 300,000 francs. He confides in a gentleman that he has 400,000 francs. That evening for the first time he is not bored at the theater and he spends the night with some girls.

The lines quoted previously — "Happy will be the man who wins her. He could never find a better wife", — ring ironically through the story. His wife has indeed provided for him, even after her death. But again the situation reverses itself. A short paragraph ends the story: "Six months later he remarried. His second wife was very respectable [contrast the first], but of a difficult disposition [contrast the first]. She made him suffer a lot [contrast the first]" (p. 201):

Often anthologized, "The Jewels" is praised for its compression and economy of detail. Praise is justified. It is difficult to see how Maupassant could have handled the story in a more effective way. The point of view of the detached omniscient narrator sets the mood and tone. The ironic structure reinforces the theme. But Maupassant has also been criticized. It is suggested that his characters are too little explored and too patently typed, that M. Lantin's wife is not sufficiently motivated and that, consequently, the theme is not convincing. But such criticism, it seems to me, asks more of this narrative than it is. Maupassant does what he sets out to do beautifully and convincingly. The characters are typed, it is true, but focusing as he does on the structure of ironic contrasts, on plot rather than character, had he provided more complex characters, he

would have destroyed the structure and distorted the theme. Such criticism of Maupassant seems to me to be the result of the critic's not recognizing the limitations of the genre the author uses here.

Another of Maupassant's stories which is often criticized for lack of multivalent meanings is the well-known "La Mère Sauvage". This one is more complicated in theme and structure than "The Jewels", but still, I think, fits better into the category of simple narrative.<sup>6</sup> In "La Mère Sauvage" Maupassant provides a frame for his story, a first person account which sets the initial mood and tone of the story and, perhaps, suggests a symbolic identification of the peaceful countryside with the remembered happy days of youth. The first person narrator has returned with a friend, Serval, to the woods at Virelogne to hunt. It is fifteen years after the Franco-Prussian War. The narrator speaks of his love for the district, of its sensuous charms, of having rubbed elbows there with happiness. Suddenly he comes upon a skeleton of a house. It is bare and sinister and he recalls the name of the people who had lived there — "les Sauvage". He calls to his friend and Serval tells him the story.

The point of view shifts, but the tone continues muted. Since her son has enlisted in the army, Madame Sauvage is alone in her house in the Virelogne woods. Then Prussian soldiers are quartered there. The old woman gets along well with the four blond and gentle soldiers. The war seems far from them. The soldiers help her with the household tasks like four good sons about their mother. They render her many services, and she

<sup>6</sup> Difficulty in placing stories into categories does not, of course, negate the existence of the categories. I am indebted to Professor William A. Drew for calling my attention to the following: Ernst Mayr, *Animal Species and Evolution* (1963). "Taxonomy is not alone in encountering difficulties when trying to assign concrete phenomena to categories. Most of the universally accepted concepts of our daily life encounter similar difficulties. The transition in category from subspecies to species is paralleled by the transition from child to adult, from spring to summer, from day to night. Do we abandon these categories because there are borderline cases and transitions? Do we abandon the concept tree because there are dwarf willows, giant cactuses, and strangler figs? Such conflicts are encountered whenever one is confronted with the task of assigning phenomena to categories" (p. 22).

loves them well, although her thoughts often go to her own son, tall, thin, and dark, so different from the four Prussian youths. The point is made:

... the peasantry feels no patriotic hatred; that belongs to the upper class alone. The humble, those who pay the most, because they are poor, and because every new burden crushes them down; those who are killed in masses, who make the true cannon's meat, because they are so many; those, in fine who suffer most cruelly the atrocious miseries of war, because they are the feeblest, and offer least resistance — they hardly understand at all those bellicose ardors, that excitable sense of honor, or those pretended political combinations which in six months exhaust two nations, the conqueror with the conquered.<sup>7</sup>

One day when the soldiers are away the old woman hears of her son's death. He was killed by a shell which nearly cut him in two. She imagines his death: "She seemed to see the thing: the head falling, the eyes open, while he chewed the corner of his big mustache..." (p. 58). The soldiers return and the old woman says nothing. They are laughing when they come in, delighted with a rabbit which they have brought home. She tries to prepare the breakfast, but she is unable to kill the rabbit. One of the soldiers gives it a blow behind its ears. Now, in a very powerful scene which makes symbolic identification between the dead rabbit and the dead son, the climax of the story occurs. The old woman skins the rabbit, but the sight of the warm blood, cooling and coagulating, makes her tremble. She imagines her son, cut in two, and red, like the still-palpitating rabbit. She manages to prepare the food and sits down at the table with the soldiers, but she is unable to eat. While she watches them devour the rabbit, she hatches a plan. That night when the soldiers are asleep she sets the cottage afire. Later, when she is questioned by German officers, she tells the whole story from beginning to end. They seize her and throw her against the walls of her still hot house and they execute her. In this way the horror, the atrocities of war, come to the peaceful woods at Virelogne.

<sup>7</sup> Ray B. West, Jr. and Robert Wooster Stallman, *The Art of Modern Fiction* (1960), p. 58. Citations are to this edition.



The story breaks to the first person narrator, who picks up from its position at his feet a little stone still blackened by the flames. This stone remains a real and concrete objectification of war, although at Virelogne still, the reader must recall, the countryside is dotted with little woods and crossed by brooks which flash in the sun and look like veins carrying blood to the earth.

In this story characterization is more detailed than in "The Jewels". The reader comes to know the tall and lean woman who goes by the name of la Sauvage. The four Prussian youths, although not extensively characterized, are detailed sufficiently so that an image of the blond, smiling boys is always felt. The setting is used effectively and is drawn into the theme of the story. The shifting point of view is used skillfully so that the horror of the atrocities of war is muted by the quiet countryside. The old woman surely stands for all mothers, and her behavior is made completely credible by means of the symbolic situation identifying dead rabbit with dead son. Still, although the author makes use of a symbolic situation, the symbol does not extend, nor does it direct meaning; there is no multivalence; there are no questions; the reader's satisfaction is immediate.

As with Maupassant where occasionally one finds a story which exhibits some of the characteristics of the short story, so with Thurber. Most of his short pieces clearly fit into the category of the simple narrative. Still, one occasionally finds a piece which moves toward the short story form. Such a story as "The Catbird Seat" is obviously simple narrative. On the other hand, such a story as "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" is harder to categorize.

One of Thurber's favorite themes is the domination of the American male by the American female. "The Catbird Seat", however, tells the story of the triumph of Erwin Martin, head of the filing department of F & S, of whom his boss has once said, "Man is fallible but Martin isn't", over Mrs. Ulgine Barrows, whose "quacking voice and braying laugh" has, in Martin's opinion, profaned the halls of F & S too long.<sup>8</sup> As the story

<sup>8</sup> Blaze O. Bonazza and Emil Roy, *Studies in Fiction* (1965), p. 229.



opens, Mr. Martin is embarked on a plan to "rub-out" Mrs. Barrows. She is a threat to him because she is ready to move into his department to destroy his efficient filing system. He has planned to visit her at her apartment and there to find a weapon to kill her with. But when he gets to the apartment, he is nervous, unable to speak. The gross improbability of the situation soon strikes him, but as soon as it does, another idea begins to bloom, strange and wonderful. He sits with a drink (his first) and a cigarette (also his first) and says, "I drink and smoke all the time". Among other things, he insults his employer, and, when the astonished Mrs. Barrows asks if he takes dope or something, he admits to taking heroin. The next morning Mrs. Barrows reports to the boss the events of the previous evening, but the boss, aware of Mr. Martin's usual habits, will not believe her. He thinks she has suffered a complete nervous breakdown. Finally Mrs. Barrows confronts Mr. Martin, and as she screams imprecations, the climactic moment occurs. She is hustled out of the office and Mr. Martin returns quietly to his files.

Interest in this story lies clearly on surface level. There are no symbols, no implications beyond the action of the plot. Characterization is adequate. There is economy of detail and skillful execution of the action to the climax.

In "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" Thurber explores much the same theme but in greater depth. Again the little man is pitted against the dominant female, this time his nagging wife. Unable to cope with her in the real world, Mitty escapes by means of dreams to another world where he is always triumphant. But the situation is complicated by a symbolic identification, for Mitty is not only unable to cope with his wife but he is unable to cope with everything that his wife represents. She symbolizes authority, not only the authority of figures in some kind of power, but also the power of the machine, the symbol for Mitty of a world which keeps him in constant submission.

Mitty's fears and frustrations are evident in terms of his behavior in the real world and in his dreams. In the real world his wife nags him about his driving, about his absent minded-

ness, about his need for overshoes and gloves. The tapocketa-pocketa sound in the first fantasy is the sound of the pounding of cylinders but it is also clearly the sound made by the nagging wife. The identification of the wife with a figure in authority is evidenced in the situation where Mitty, to satisfy his wife, puts on his gloves. After he has dropped her off at the beauty parlor and he is sure she is out of sight, he takes off his gloves. But then a policeman at the change of lights barks a command to Mitty to get going and, without thinking, Mitty hastily pulls on his gloves and lurches ahead.

Each of the situations in the story which show Mitty acting in the real world presents his inadequacies. When, for example, he tries to get the car into a parking lot, he pulls into the wrong lane. Then, after attempting to back out of the lane, Mitty is stopped by an attendant who, in what Mitty takes to be an insolent manner, tells him to leave the car where it is. But Mitty forgets to leave the key and has to be reminded of that. The incident with the parking lot attendant reveals not only Mitty's inability to handle the automobile, one of the machines in the story, but also his feelings about his inadequacy. After leaving the lot Mitty recalls the time when he tried to take the chains off the tires of his car and got them wound around the axles. A young, grinning garageman had to get him out of this difficulty. "The next time", Mitty thinks, "I'll wear my right arm in a sling; they won't grin at me then."<sup>9</sup> In another incident, after Mitty finally remembers that he is supposed to buy puppy biscuit, he goes into an A & P store, not the first one he comes to but a smaller one down the street.

The dream sequences, too, present Mitty's inability to handle things in the real world by showing him as he would like to be. The dream sequences fall into a pattern. In each sequence Mitty is in full control of some kind of machine. In almost every dream the tapocketa-pocketa sound is heard. In the first dream, for example, Mitty is a commander of a huge hydroplane, and, despite terrifying weather conditions, he is taking the ship through. The extent of Mitty's actual knowledge of the machine

<sup>9</sup> Knickerbocker and Reninger, p. 111.

is shown by the lack of detail describing it. The instrument panel on the plane is for Mitty a row of complicated dials.

An attempt to analyze "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" necessarily focuses on a serious vein which underlies the story and makes it much more difficult to categorize than "The Catbird Seat", where nothing suggests a subsurface. The surface level of "Walter Mitty" is clearly humorous. The structure of the story which makes effective use of comic incongruity presents the image, first of all, of the small man, inadequate in real life, as the heroic figure in the day-dreams. This image is constantly reinforced, not only by the lead-ins from the real life sequences to the dream sequences, hilarious in themselves, but also by an omniscient author, who makes clear the comic juxtaposition:

"I want some biscuits for small, young dogs," he said to the clerk. "Any special brand, sir?" The greatest pistol shot in the world thought for a moment. "It says 'Puppies Bark for It' on the box," said Walter Mitty. (p. 112)

But the more one contemplates the story, the more serious it seems to appear. An analysis of the dream sequences reveals not only the fears and frustrations of the man but also his latent hostility. The last sequence, which shows him before a firing squad, seems to suggest a symbolic reading. One can laugh at Mitty and recognize his relationship to Mitty and the universally practiced day dream only if one refuses to analyze serious consequences. A question arises: is Mitty sick or merely human?

Although Edgar Allan Poe is considered by some to be the father of the short story, it does seem to me that many of his narratives fall into the category of the simple narrative. If they do, it would help to explain why so many people are dissatisfied with many of Poe's stories since they would expect to find in them a symbolic structure and multiple levels of meaning which simply do not appear. There seems to me to be no doubt that such pieces as "The Cask of Amontillado" with its ambiguity concerning the guilt feelings of the narrator, "The Masque of the Red Death" with its setting, situation, and characters revealed as microcosmic representations of the real world, "Wil-

liam Wilson" with its objectification of dual personality, "The Fall of the House of Usher" with its carefully detailed identification of scene and character, are short stories. But such pieces as "The Black Cat", "The Tell-Tale Heart", "The Pit and the Pendulum", "The Premature Burial", and the less well known but beautifully executed "Hop-Frog" fit better into the category of the simple narrative.

"The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart" are typical. The former is told in the first person by a man who, surely mad although he denies it, in a fit of anger at his cat, kills his wife, and then, when it appears all danger of his apprehension is passed, in an act of bravado, unwittingly becomes the agent of the discovery of the corpse. He describes the events which have caused his downfall, calling them a series of mere household events, insisting that he does not mean to place upon them the burden of supernatural cause and effect. Carefully he reconstructs the series of events, beginning at his infancy and noting his docility and tenderness of heart and his fondness for animals. He says that he married early a woman of congenial disposition and they keep a household of pets including a large and beautiful cat. He experiences a close friendship with the cat that lasts for several years until he is inflicted by the Fiend Intemperance which causes a radical alteration in his character. He becomes moody, irritable, intemperate in his language and violent in his behavior, in short, demoniacal. One night, while intoxicated and in a fit of fiendish malevolence, he cuts one of the cat's eyes from its socket.

After a short period of guilt and horror he is again seized by a spirit of perverseness and he hangs the cat. That night his house burns down and all his possessions. Later he finds the figure of the cat graven in bas-relief on a plaster wall that has resisted the fire. Again for a short time he is haunted by feelings of guilt and regret for the loss of the cat, but one night he sees another cat that resembles the first cat and he takes it home with him. Day after day the presence of the second cat haunts him until finally he attempts to murder it with an axe. When his wife tries to stop him, he goes into a greater rage and mur-



ders her instead. After the murder he casts about for the best way to dispose of the body and decides to wall it up in a false chimney. Finished with this task, he notices that the cat has disappeared and with great relief he sleeps soundly the night through. His deed escapes detection until, while showing a party of policemen through the house, in an act of triumph and bravado, he raps with a cane upon the facade of the chimney-place. His rap is answered by a shriek; he has walled the cat alive in the tomb.

Similar in structure and point of view to "The Black Cat" is "The Tell-Tale Heart". Again the first person narrator insists he is not mad, this time by pointing out how acute his senses are (especially his hearing) and how logically he proceeds in his work. Unlike "The Black Cat", there is in this story no background exposition but rather an immediate movement into the plot line with the presentation of an old man who happens to possess an evil eye that haunts the narrator. Carefully the narrator plans and prepares for the murder of the old man. When the time comes, in the prevailing silence, the narrator hears the beating of the old man's heart. While he stands transfixed, the beating grows louder and louder. At last the narrator commits the murder, but for some minutes after, the heart beats on. The narrator dismembers the body and places the pieces beneath the flooring of the room. When the police investigate, the narrator, now calm and chatting brightly, takes them all over the house and with wild audacity seats himself upon the very spot beneath which lies the corpse. Then he begins to hear the sound of the heart beat. Again it grows louder and louder, driving him to hysteria and at length to confession.

In both these stories plot is the basic element. Everything contributes to it and to the final effect of terror. Poe makes use here, of course, of the conventional Gothic devices — violence, coincidental situations, melodrama, but as usual surpasses them and with great skill draws the reader from the opening sentences into the nightmare world. There is no attempt to establish credibility; there is no need for it. The world is the world of the monomaniac, and the reader immediately recognizes it as



such. With a perfect sense of prose rhythms and a use of language appropriate to the scenes, with skillful execution of light and shadow, silence and sound, with beautiful timing of plot movement and climax, Poe involves the reader in a vicarious participation in the terror of the situation, but not in its meaning. At the end of the story the reader is able to leave the situation intact. There is no suggestion given within the framework of the story to direct the reader to meaningful implications. In neither case can the narrator or the situation be taken to be symbolic of a universe in which the reader can place himself. Never is it suggested within the narrative that the protagonist is a mirror of the universe or that the universe is an extension of the world the reader knows.

In "Hop-Frog" the narrative method is somewhat different as is the point of view. Rather than a straight plot line Poe makes use of the comic contrast and to accomplish this he uses a narrator who is not the protagonist. The story is a terrible, grotesque joke, and the feeling of horror consequent to a reading of it is so intense as to be painful. The grotesque joke is carried through the story and provides the unity in which the parts share. Theme, characters, structure, all reinforce the joke. This joke, this last jest, of the dwarf is an act of terrible revenge based on a situation which does not have sufficient import to justify his sadistic retribution.

The theme, stated simply, but raised to universal terms concerns men's desires for violent retribution in situations where they feel that their dignity has suffered unnecessary and unjustified debasement. So it is with the dwarf, who is indeed affronted in a most cruel way and who carries through his revenge in a determined, sadistic manner, thus allowing the reader to identify a desire which is universally experienced but necessarily sublimated.

The theme of the story is itself based on a comic incongruity. The dwarf is crippled, forced to walk between a leap and a wriggle. He is likened to a squirrel or a monkey because of the prodigious strength of his arms. This dwarf is able to bend to his will a king and his seven wise ministers. The dwarf's intel-

lect and cunning are juxtaposed against his position as a fool in the court. This role is ambivalent, manifested in a comic contrast, for this fool is no fool at all.

The dwarf is cruelly forced to drink wine which excites him almost to madness. Then, seeing the king throw a glass of wine into the face of Trippetta, a female dwarf, Hop-Frog is enraged. A growl escapes from his lips, although he denies it is of his making. He outlines to the king an artful joke, which the monarch may play on the masqueraders invited to a coming ball. Ironically, the king and the seven ministers are to dress as ourang-outangs and make sport with the guests, especially frightening the women. All preparation is to be left in the hands of Hop-Frog and Trippetta. His revenge is diabolic. All goes according to plan, and the climax is a frenzied scene, where the king and the ministers, costumed as apes, face one another, chained together; while the monkey-like dwarf taunts them and finally sets them afire. What has started out as the king's joke becomes the dwarf's, as he makes his last jest.

The story is told in the first person by a narrator who is aware and who makes the reader aware of all the ironies in the situation. The structure of the story is characterized by a succession of juxtaposed events and double-edged statements, describing the characters and the plot and giving explicit commentary on the comic contrast. Thus the narrator in a series of asides both sets the stage for the enactment of the revenge and points up the ironies of the situation. This kind of explication and enumeration continues until the reader is made aware of the full extent of the irony. The chatty tone which the narrator assumes is further example of the comic contrast. The whole story proposes a grotesque comic situation whose implications culminate in a unified and forceful effect of horror.

An analysis of this story cannot fail to reveal the total unity of the narrative. Theme, characters, and plot combine to form the basis of the comic contrast and to signify meaning. But there is no evidence within the narrative that Poe means that characters, situation, or setting should yield implications beyond the obvious. The world of the king and his court cannot be

considered to be a microcosm; the dwarf is not a symbolic figure. The plot is symbolic only in so far as the theme states a universal truth. For these reasons, it seems to me, that "Hop-Frog" belongs in the category of the simple narrative.

## VII

### THE SHORT STORY AND THE NOVEL

Like the short story, the novel has been traditionally hard to define, but there are general areas of agreement which are easy to discern. It is generally agreed, for example, that the novel is a relatively new form, having its beginnings early in the eighteenth century with such writers as Defoe and Richardson. It is also generally agreed that conditions were right for the emergence of the new genre. Widespread printing, the growth of literacy, the proliferation of journals, the renewal of interest in the Theophrastic character, the popularity of travel literature, manuals of piety and instruction, and criminal biography, the emergence of a large middle class as an audience, and, most important, a new way to look at the world, created a climate out of which the novel arose. The emergence of the novel is unavoidably linked with the new scientific rationalism. The one word most often used not only with the novel itself but also with its emergence is the word "realism". In the past, reality had been defined as universal truths; it was something large and transcending the individual. Now, reality implied the existence of particular truths as reflected through the individual. Before the novel could arise the necessary philosophic assumption that the individual could perceive the truth through his senses had to be asserted.

In his book *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt locates the individual by reference to two coordinates — space and time. He says, "The novel is surely distinguished from previous forms of fiction by the amount of attention it habitually accords both to the individualization of its characters and to the detailed pre-

sentation of their environment.”<sup>1</sup> Since the new audience was not a highly educated one, schooled in classical antiquities and allusions, the language of the new fiction had to be referential rather than suggestive. High flown rhetoric disappeared, while plain prose took its place. Watt sums up:

Formal realism, in fact, is the narrative embodiment of a premise that Defoe and Richardson accepted very literally, but which is implicit in the novel form in general: the premise, or primary convention, that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, when the real world came to be defined in terms of particular people acting in particular incidents, and having individualized sense impressions by which they could locate the nature of the real, when the movement of life came to be seen in terms of an emerging pattern of interrelationships between events and characters, the novel emerged as the form of fiction best suited to reflect the new world view. The illusion of reality which it, as art form, presents is literal authenticity to the material facts of the extensional world.

Defoe is given credit for introducing into the new form the wealth of circumstantial detail and matter of fact statement that caused his readers to accept the literal authenticity of the narratives ascribed to Robinson Crusoe and Moll Flanders. A master of the literal, Defoe piles detail upon detail to produce, as Allen states, “an illusion of complete reality”. Allen continues:

In *Robinson Crusoe*, for example, the shipwreck and the hero's sojourn on his island, though the most important parts of the book, are still only parts. Before he reaches the point of being cast away, Crusoe passes through a whole gamut of adventures. . . . By the time we reach the shipwreck it has already become in our mind something that would inevitably happen to a man like him; it is, in

<sup>1</sup> “Realism and the Novel Form”, *Approaches to the Novel*, ed. Robert Scholes (1961), p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> P. 79.



other words, in character. The smaller lies have conditioned us to accept the bigger one.<sup>3</sup>

But more important than the massing of circumstantial detail to establish credibility of scene and character in *Robinson Crusoe*, is the invention of a developing character in a plot governed by causality and thus the achievement of dramatic coherence as is found in *Moll Flanders*. This novel is a portrait of a woman, told in the first person by her, setting forth the details of her childhood and life. The action falls into several well-defined episodes of varying length. The use of the first person combined with the realities of Moll's personality make consistent the total structure of the novel. The brilliant opening section which recounts Moll's childhood to the death of her nurse serves to set the scene presenting social circumstances which become causative in plot structure. This section also defines character and thus sets up motivating forces that carry through the novel and presents events which serve to foreshadow consequences that must inevitably follow.

A combination of her own inner weaknesses and social circumstances lead her from one love affair and marriage to another, and then, as she loses her youth, into a life of crime. At first there are stirrings of conscience, but one rationalization after another brings her to a state of complete depravity as she lies in Newgate prison. While there, however, and with the help of a minister, she comes face to face with the realities of evil and its consequences and accomplishes repentance. Her repentance is shallow, but Moll is a shallow woman, capable of no deep involvement, no really deep feeling except her primary fear of poverty. Her repentance being achieved, it is, in terms of her ethic, only right and proper that she should prosper as she does by the accumulation of material goods. Spiritual salvation inevitably brings material salvation.

It does not seem to me to be valid criticism to condemn the novel because it embraces a "morality of measurement".<sup>4</sup> The

<sup>3</sup> *The English Novel* (1954), pp. 25-26.

<sup>4</sup> See Mark Schorer's introduction to the Modern Library Edition of *Moll Flanders* (1950).

morality is Moll's, and her behavior is consistent throughout the novel. It is unfair to identify Defoe with Moll and to blame him for what is by our standards a deficient moral sense. It is fair and proper to credit him with a technique which reflects a vision of the real world whose proportions are recognizable.

Succeeding examples of the novel form follow the same basic structure but employ different techniques of story-telling and, in so doing, emphasize different aspects or angles of vision of the real world. Richardson adopted the epistolary method which enabled him to make exhaustive analyses of the characters as they think and feel and to slow the action to such an extent that the reader is able to participate vicariously in the duration of time. While in *Moll Flanders* point of view restricts vision to the consciousness of a single character, in such a novel as *Clarissa*, Richardson is able to present a variety of worlds as they are seen by different characters who report the action through their letters. Fielding, characteristically, uses yet another technique to achieve yet another vision of the real world. Making use of an omniscient narrator, perhaps the author himself, who emerges as a congenial commentator and guide, Fielding achieves a more objective view and, with it, an esthetic distance more detached than was previously possible. The omniscient narrator, knowing his characters and everything about them, is able to enter at will into their different consciousnesses so that an even more expansive world view is possible. Since the presentation of character is not limited to a single view, the development of character is different. Character is revealed primarily in action, in what Howard Mumford Jones describes as "the accumulation of minute differentiae in performance, in the casual introduction of a qualifying adjective or phrase".<sup>5</sup>

The esthetic detachment achieved by the use of this point of view is important in another way. It allows the necessary distance so that satire can function and makes of the novel what Fielding described as a comic epic in prose, giving it, in effect, another angle by which the real world can be seen. But it is

<sup>5</sup> See Howard Mumford Jones' introduction to the Modern Library Edition of *Joseph Andrews* (1950), p. xx.

not until the next century that Fielding's method is picked up and carried on in the flowering of the novel in the Victorian period. The next great novelist in the eighteenth century, Laurence Sterne, in his brilliant *Tristram Shandy*, goes back to the limited view of a single narrator who is the protagonist of the action, but Sterne expands the vision in a different way. Concerning himself more with the workings of the individual mind than with external action, and recognizing the difference between time as it exists in individual awareness and clock time, Sterne contrives a technique to mirror yet another vision of the world, different from those of his predecessors but no less real. His purpose is to present life as it is being lived, which, as Walter Allen notices "does not at all resemble life as it is generalized after the moment has passed".<sup>6</sup> The mind does not proceed in orderly and logical sequence, but rather, as Virginia Woolf much later points out, "The mind receives a myriad impressions — trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms."<sup>7</sup> Nor does time proceed in the orderly sequence that the clock might lead us to believe. Ordinary awareness makes it clear that a minute might seem an hour and an hour a minute and time spent the day before yesterday might be more real in our consciousness than the present moment. Literary historians like to say that Sterne contributed to the form of the novel the "art of digression". But this term can be misleading, for chaotic as the structure of the novel seems to be, it is apparent chaos and not real. Once the technique of the book is recognized and the characters established the apparently helter-skelter dispersion of ideas can be seen to take a definite order. Indeed, as Bergen Evans points out, "Once the biases of the various characters are known to us, we can foresee the direction of dispersal and the significance of the delays and digressions."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *The English Novel*, p. 74.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in *The English Novel*, p. 74.

<sup>8</sup> See Bergen Evans' introduction to the Modern Library Edition of *Tristram Shandy* (1950), p. xi.

The eighteenth century novel, then, though written with a variety of techniques and therefore presenting different angles of vision, still keeps its primary focus on the presentation of a real world, on the presentation of individualized characters acting at a given moment in a recognizable place. Meaning in the novels is achieved by means of the location of the characters in the action. There is no searching after the extension of meaning achieved by a symbolic structure. Although in the novels certain actions take on symbolic significance to foreshadow inevitable consequences of behavior, as occurs, for example, in *Pamela* when Pamela explains in a letter to her parents that she cannot leave Lord B's house, although her virtue is every day being threatened, because she must finish the embroidery on her master's waistcoat or in *Moll Flanders*, when Moll after the termination of each of her affairs takes the time to count her money and take stock of her possessions, such symbolic actions reinforce meaning. They do not delineate it.

In the nineteenth century the novel achieved its full flowering not only in England but also on the continent. Such novels as *Vanity Fair*, *Madame Bovary*, and *War and Peace* stand almost as archetypes in the development of the novel in that century. Harking back to Fielding's use of a narrator as guide and commentator, Thackeray is able to achieve a scope both comprehensive and direct, to present a world, as Joseph Warren Beach says, "most variegated and full", in its covering of the English social structure.<sup>9</sup> Thackeray's purpose was a realistic study of men and women in society, and he succeeded to the extent that his novel has been called a valuable social document as well as a convincing and marvelous fictional panorama of men and manners. In plot development, Thackeray breaks away from Fielding, sweeping away the mechanism of mystery in the form of dubious births, missing heirs, etc. The plot movement derives entirely from the characters, their individual personalities, and their relationship to one another.

Character is revealed through an examination of manners,

<sup>9</sup> See Joseph Warren Beach's introduction to the Modern Library Edition of *Vanity Fair* (1950), p. viii.



thus many of the dramatized scenes become kinds of symbolic acts. This method of delineating character is shown immediately in the famous first scene of the novel. Becky's isolation from the group, her overt rebellion, is dramatized by her flinging of a copy of Johnson's Dictionary back into the garden. But such scenes function to reveal character; they suggest nothing more than is immediately apparent. Character, in turn, provides plot movement. Because Becky is seen to be in overt rebellion, forced to rely on herself to achieve a level of social standing, it is entirely credible that she start the next episode by setting her cap for Amelia's brother Jos.

The idea that Becky is the concretizing of a whole civilization, "a small scale model of a world, a microcosm in which the social macrocosm is subtilized and intensified and made significant", is pertinent and significant to this discussion.<sup>10</sup> If Becky is called a symbol it must be in a limited sense. Perhaps it would be better to say she is not so much a symbol as a sign whose dimensions are carefully provided by the framework of the novel. The novel defines Becky and Becky defines the novel. There is no extension of the image.

*Madame Bovary* stands in the opinion of many readers as the crowning achievement of literary realism in France and, further, as the one novel that has had the greatest influence on the history of literature. At the time when *Madame Bovary* was being published serially the great controversy concerning the relative value of romanticism and realism was being fought out in literature and painting. The chief artistic principle of the realists was that of complete fidelity to observable reality. An artist, they felt, should depict only what he saw around him, and what he saw around him encompassed the whole of reality. Flaubert's contribution to this movement can be measured in terms of the perfection of his craft. Indeed, as Percy Lubbock says, "It is the novel of all novels which the criticism of fiction cannot overlook; as soon as ever we speak of the principles of art, we must be prepared to engage with Flaubert."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Dorothy Van Ghent, *The English Novel* (1961), p. 145.

<sup>11</sup> *The Craft of Fiction* (1957), p. 60.



The novel has had excellent analysis. Critic after critic has pointed out the remarkable accuracy of the portrayal of provincial life and character, the tightly constructed plot, the skillful use of detail, the subtle and precise characterization and description, the sensitive style, the exact syntax. Perhaps one of the most careful analyses of the structure of the novel is that made by West and Stallman in their book *The Art of Modern Fiction*.<sup>12</sup> They point out that the novel is constructed of a series of built up moods. All of Emma's romantic moods of illusory happiness crumble in countermoods of despair. This opposition between romantic aspiration and reality forms the basic set of ironic juxtapositions operable in the novel. Emma and Leon, Charles and Homais are blinded by illusions. A romantic affinity forms a bond between Emma and Leon, but Charles, too, has naive dreams which doom him to disappointment, and Homais' faith in progress stands as the particularized illusion of the bourgeois. Rodolphe and Lheureux are anti-romantics, exploiting romantic visions for their own ends. Crass reality is represented by the blind man, all his loathsome qualities brought into sharper focus by the romantic song that he sings, a song that coincides with Emma's death.

The reputation of this novel is based primarily on its tightly worked structure. Everything in it functions to further the theme. In structure it is much like some of the simple narratives I have previously analyzed, and the unity it achieves is not different from that pointed out by numerous critics as the particular province of the short story as opposed to the novel. The unity of *Madame Bovary*, of course, belies the idea that a novel because of its length must, of necessity, be looser in form than shorter fiction.

*War and Peace* is by popular consensus one of the greatest novels of all time. Its greatness, however, rests not on a unity of effect but rather on its greatness of scope, its wide variety of characters and situations, its sense of movement, and its evocation of a particular time in Russian history. There are struc-

<sup>12</sup> Pp. 569-581.

tural defects, particularly the intrusion of Tolstoy's theory of history, which becomes more evident in the second half of the novel until it finally forces aside the story. But what a reader remembers about *War and Peace* is not its didacticism but its particular convincingness — the individual, the local, the temporal. The great characters — Prince Andrew and Pierre, Princess Maria and Natasha — are generally remembered not so much as characters in fiction but rather as men and women of actual experience. The narrative is composed on a grand scale, its vast proportions, numerous personages, frequent changes of scene, and the close interconnection of all giving the impression that it is really a record of society not only of so many individuals.

If these novels stand as representative of the particular achievement of this form in the last century, it must be admitted that there are some that seem not to have a place. The position, for example, that *Wuthering Heights* holds in the history of the English novel is dubious. F. R. Leavis in *The Great Tradition* calls it a sport.<sup>13</sup> Walter Allen says that it is the most remarkable novel in English, existing in a category of creation all its own.<sup>14</sup> But if we take *Wuthering Heights* out of its context in the stream of the development of the English novel and place it alongside the great achievements in the novel in America of the time — *The Scarlet Letter*, *Moby Dick* — we can see its derivations and understand its structure. For if there is one thing that is clear about the development of the novel in America it is that it is in many ways different from the development of the novel in England and on the continent. In the latter countries the novel emerged from the movement toward realism, but in America the novel is much more closely tied to a romantic heritage. In this respect it is more similar in form to the short story as I have described it than to the great stream of novels as they are commonly described.

In his book *The American Novel and Its Tradition*, Richard

<sup>13</sup> 1954, p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> *The English Novel*, p. 223.

Chase places a major movement of the novel in America in the romantic tradition. In making the distinction between the novel and the romance he writes:

Doubtless the main difference between the novel and the romance is in the way in which they view reality. The novel renders reality closely and in comprehensive detail. It takes a group of people and sets them going about the business of life. . . . By contrast the romance, following distantly the medieval example, feels free to render reality in less volume and detail. It tends to prefer action to character, and action will be freer in a romance than in a novel, encountering as it were less resistance from reality. . . . Being less committed to the immediate rendition of reality than the novel, the romance will more freely veer toward the mythic, allegorical, and symbolistic forms.<sup>15</sup>

Given this distinction which makes the prose romance "an independent form of fiction to be distinguished from the novel",<sup>16</sup> it is clear that Emily Brontë, Hawthorne, Melville, and many modern writers such as Conrad, Faulkner, Lawrence, Kafka, Hemingway, are romancers rather than novelists, since in their works setting, characters, and plot move toward the symbolic.<sup>17</sup> Given this distinction, it is also clear that the short story as I have described it is closer in form to the romance than it is to the simple narrative or to the novel. In both the short story and the romance symbols extend meaning to multi-levels to yield a microcosmic effect.

A single example might suffice here to make the point.<sup>18</sup> I use Kafka because in his works the similarity of structure (cutting across commonly accepted genres and regardless of length) is strikingly evident. In his book *Franz Kafka: Parable and Paradox*, Heintz Politzer begins with the slightest of narratives, a short story told in a paragraph, in the German four sentences,

<sup>15</sup> 1957, pp. 12-13.

<sup>16</sup> Northrop Frye, "Specific Continuous Forms", *Approaches to The Novel*, p. 43.

<sup>17</sup> Chase discusses the American novelists in this tradition.

<sup>18</sup> I use only one example here, but many other such pairings come to mind: "Young Goodman Brown" and *The Scarlet Letter*, "Billy Budd" and *Moby Dick*, "Heart of Darkness" and *Lord Jim*, "Wash" and *Absalom, Absalom!*, "In Another Country" and *The Sun Also Rises*, etc.

called "Give It Up!"<sup>19</sup> It is short enough to quote in full, and I quote it, as Politzer did.

It was very early in the morning, the streets clean and deserted, I was on my way to the railroad station. As I compared the tower clock with my watch I realized it was already much later than I had thought, I had to hurry, the shock of this discovery made me feel uncertain of the way, I was not very well acquainted with the town as yet, fortunately there was a policeman nearby, I ran to him and breathlessly asked him the way. He smiled and said: "From me you want to learn the way?" "Yes," I said, "since I cannot find it myself." "Give it up, give it up," said he and turned away with a great sweep, like someone who wants to be alone with his laughter.<sup>20</sup>

Simple? Yes, but deceptively so, for in this short story, as in the others I have described, setting, characters, and plot are symbols which provide meaning on many levels. In his book, Politzer goes on for twenty-two pages to determine the story's multivalence. He suggests a biographical reading where the narrator would be seen as the alienated Kafka, an Austrian Jew in Czech Prague; a sociological, where the policeman would stand as the representative of an administration "feared as well as despised", as the symbol of "an old order which still survives", functioning but ineffective; the psychological, where the narrative and the narrator become a case study. "Age old anxieties expose him [the narrator] to situations which he does not even try to master — the fear of arriving too late ... of losing one's life before he has come to its end." Or, Politzer goes on, we might find an allegory of Kafka's childhood experiences, particularly the role his father played in his upbringing, and, by extension, everyman's childhood experiences and conflict with the father. A religious interpretation would find the policeman to be a "messenger from a spiritual realm", having nothing to communicate to the human sphere but the command to give it up. And it would be possible to claim the figure in the narrative to be an existential hero. Then the policeman would function as "the spokesman of a universe totally unconcerned with the

<sup>19</sup> 1962.

<sup>20</sup> Politzer, p. 1.



information seeker's personal destiny, and radically hostile to him. This universe answers man's cry for direction with silence."

I cannot attempt such complex interpretation of Kafka's much longer narrative *The Trial*, since anything like a complete interpretation of the symbols within the narrative would result in a book length study in itself.<sup>21</sup> But I think I can suggest meaning on personal, social, and religious grounds.

The events of the plot constitute an exteriorization of man's passage through life, a symbolic portrayal from birth to death expressed in a single year. The story opens in the morning on K's thirtieth birthday. He is at once arrested and accused, and he spends the rest of the year trying to find out what he is accused of and how the laws and the court operate, indeed, what are the laws and who the members of the court. The story ends on the evening before K's thirty-first birthday when he is put to death.

There has been a great deal of speculation concerning the nature of K's guilt. Various critics have made whole catalogues of K's sins. He has been blamed for his inability to love, for his lack of clear purpose, for his mediocrity. But in the narrative there seems to be no evidence of a positive source of guilt. Nevertheless, it is clear that K *feels* guilty from the moment of his arrest. The first chapter of *The Trial* is filled with indications that K himself actually wills the proceedings. We notice that the warders do not appear until K rings a bell, and that as soon as he admits their presence and their relationship to him, he has "in a way admitted the strangers' rights to superintend his actions".<sup>22</sup> We notice, too, that he seems subconsciously to assent in the arrest, and even though the warders are standing at quite a distance from him, he makes as if to wrench himself away from them. While considering possible reasons for his arrest, he thinks that the arrest might be a joke, and the thought enters his head that "perhaps he had only

<sup>21</sup> *The Trial* is, of course, usually called a novel, but according to the distinctions being discussed here it would fit better in the category of romance.

<sup>22</sup> 1937, p. 5.



to laugh knowingly in these men's faces and they would laugh with him" (p. 7). And perhaps if he had the warders would have disappeared. But he doesn't. Instead he goes to look for his birth certificate, for visible proof of his existence. The warders, however, reject the evidence, declaring that they are only subordinates and that there are high authorities that they serve. It is interesting and revealing that these high officials "never go hunting for crime in the populace, but, as the law decrees, are drawn toward the guilty" (p. 10). The suggestion seems clear that the guilty initiate their own arrests, and, perhaps, even will their own executions. Back in his room, K is surprised that the warders have left him alone where "he had abundant opportunities to take his life" (p. 12).

When an inspector arrives, K is brought to him for questioning. The inspector asks if K is surprised at his arrest. K answers, "Certainly, I am surprised, but I am by no means very much surprised" (p. 15). Later, in an attempt to explain the details of his arrest to Fraulein Bürstner, K assumes the role of the inspector, becoming the concretizing of his own conscience, accusing himself of crime.

Events multiply to make the same point: the court is chiefly a state of mind. K says, "It is only a trial if I recognize it as such" (p. 51). But why does K will the trial? What is the guilt that drives him to it? In its broadest implications, it seems to me, that it is guilt attached to existence itself. Once born, man is not content just to exist. He questions, and as he questions, *he* is questioned. In effect, he tries to justify his existence. He is constantly on trial to prove his worth, to prove his right to live. But only death can justify life, and, difficult as it may be, he must accept death as a condition of life. Nothing but death finally suffices — not sexuality, not family, not friends, not art, not religion.

Not sexuality. Consider the women in the narrative, notably Fraulein Bürstner, Leni, and the washerwoman. K's feelings about Fraulein Bürstner are suggested first in his conversation with the landlady. K observes that Fraulein Bürstner often comes in late and then agrees with his landlady that "young people are

like that" (p. 28). But, he adds, "it can go too far". Taking her cue from him, the landlady accuses Fraulein Bürstner of loose behavior and the comment puts K into sudden fury. "You have obviously misunderstood my remark", he cries out (p. 29). He tries to convince himself that Fraulein Bürstner is an ordinary little typist, but he is aware that her appearance can be misleading and that "she may be just as promiscuous as Leni or the washerwoman".<sup>23</sup> At first glance, Leni seems "to abound with affection and compassion", but she is described with images to suggest that she is "little more than a thing", "a negotiable object", her promiscuity being clearly revealed.<sup>24</sup> The washerwoman, too, appears to be a curious blend, this time of "motherhood and promiscuity".<sup>25</sup>

The women seem to operate on "the periphery of the law".<sup>26</sup> All are in some way or another connected with the court. There is a suggestion of some kind of secret agreement between the women and the law. Indeed, it appears that the women carry on their own trial against K.

Not family, not the law, not art will suffice. K's uncle Karl comes to visit him and tells him that he cannot become a family disgrace. It is the uncle who takes K to the lawyer Huld. The lawyer is devoid of human feelings. He takes a strictly academic interest in K's trial. Surrounded by ambiguities, the lawyer makes clear the impossibility of help for K from this direction. The painter, too, is an ambiguous figure. He is the court painter, "I inherited the connection", he says. "My father was the court painter before me" (p. 190). The door behind the bed of the artist leads straight into the offices of the court. And, although he says that he might be able to help, it is clear that he cannot. His paintings are covered with dust under his bed.

Nor can religion help. In the cathedral, the priest tells K that he casts about too much for outside help. The church is always there but only for him who enters of his own volition. Its

<sup>23</sup> Politzer, p. 195.

<sup>24</sup> Politzer, p. 192.

<sup>25</sup> Politzer, p. 197.

<sup>26</sup> Politzer, p. 200.

doors are open for those who come and those who go. It wants nothing of him. It contributes nothing to his defense. The priest, too, belongs to the court.

The short and graphic last chapter describes the ritual of K's death. Two men come for him. At first he recognizes the inevitable. "So you are meant for me?" he asks. As the company goes down the stairs, the two men try to take K's arms. "Wait till we're in the street", K says. "I'm not an invalid" (p. 280). In the street they take hold of both his arms and he walks rigidly between them. Once he tests their determination. "I won't go any farther", he says experimentally (p. 281). But the two men do not loosen their grip. Then suddenly before them there appears a figure resembling Fraulein Bürstner. K is not sure that it is she, but the appearance causes him to realize the futility of resistance, and he sets himself in motion, his companions allowing him to take the lead. In complete harmony they move along until they come to a small stone quarry, deserted and desolate. They help him remove his coat, his waistcoat, and his shirt, and finally they settle him on the ground, propping his head against a boulder. But in spite of all their pains K's posture remains contorted and unnatural looking. There follows a ritual whereby they pass over his head a double-edged butcher's knife. In time, K perceives that he is supposed to seize the knife and plunge it into his own breast. But he cannot rise to the occasion. He has not the strength necessary for the deed. He looks around and thinks he sees a human figure, faint and insubstantial. At once he begins to hope:

Who was it? A friend? A good man? Someone who sympathized? Someone who wanted to help? Was it one person only? Or was it mankind? Was help at hand? Were there arguments in his favor that had been overlooked? Of course, there must be. Logic is doubtless unshakable, but it cannot withstand a man who wants to go on living. Where was the judge whom he had never seen? Where was the high court, to which he had never penetrated? (p. 286)

But the hope ends in despair. They thrust the knife into his heart and turn it twice. And he dies, aware that it is like a dog, "as if the shame of it must outlive him" (p. 286).

Even a brief analysis makes apparent that the structure of *The Trial* is in no way different from the structure of "Give It Up!". In each there is a single protagonist seeking to locate the nature of the real and his place in it. In each, characters, plot, and setting function symbolically to yield meaning at various levels. Both are unified, coherent, closely worked forms. Neither can be said to present literal authenticity to the material facts of the extensional world. Although, if anything, the shorter piece is more "realistic" than the longer. Except for length there is no difference in theme or structure.

## VIII

### THE SHORT STORY: A PROPOSED DEFINITION

Short narrative fiction is as old as the history of literature; short narrative *prose* fiction is as old as the history of prose fiction. But the short story, as we know it today, is the newest of literary genres. Something happened to the short tale early in the Nineteenth Century to cause Brander Matthews later in the century to proclaim the birth of a new genre characterized by brevity, a closely wrought texture, freedom from excrescence, and a unity of effect. The origins of the new form are to be found in the writings of Irving, Gogol, Poe, and Hawthorne. Since Poe was the first to theorize upon the kind of tale then being written and to attempt to define it, the definition is as old as the form. In itself, there is nothing wrong with a definition that has not been revised or subjected to much examination in better than a hundred years, as long as the definition is valid. But the definition that we have is something of a problem. Its terms are too broad; its diction imprecise.

Consider, for example, the word "brevity". How brief is brief? There is as much difference in length between a three page story and a thirty page story as between a thirty page story and a three hundred page story. Obviously "brief" is a relative term, applying more to the limits of the author's conception than to any actual page length. Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" is shorter than "Wash", but we call them both short stories. And *Madame Bovary* is no less a novel because it runs to some three hundred and fifty pages than, say, *Crime and Punishment*, which is more than twice as long.

And the other terms — "closeness of texture", "freedom from



excrescence", "unity of effect" — can apply to all art forms. Beauty is often defined as the harmony of parts in a whole, and a large number of literary theorists take the idea of the organic whole as a standard for judgment.

The idea that a short story deals with a single character in a single action is useful but not always applicable. Short story after short story belies the limitation to a single protagonist. Lawrence's "The Horse-Dealer's Daughter" and "The Prussian Officer" have dual protagonists, and in Faulkner's "Dry September" there are at least three. Granted, most stories do deal with a single protagonist, but so do many novels.

It seems better to define the short story in terms of its overall purpose and structure, and this is what I have tried to do. Beginning with an examination of Hawthorne's literary theory and noticing the clear relationship between what Hawthorne thought literature should be and what his stories were, then moving to the literary theory and a selection of stories by representative modern masters of the form, I find similarities which seem to me to be useful.

The short story derives from the romantic tradition. The metaphysical view that there is more to the world than that which can be apprehended through the senses provides the rationale for the structure of the short story which is a vehicle for the author's probing of the nature of the real. As in the metaphysical view, reality lies beyond the ordinary world of appearances, so in the short story, meaning lies beneath the surface of the narrative. The framework of the narrative embodies symbols which function to question the world of appearances and to point to a reality beyond the facts of the extensional world.

There is, however, a group of stories which does not fit the definition that I propose. They are brief, closely wrought, and unified, but they do not have the depth or complexity provided by a symbolic structure. These stories I categorize separately under the title of simple narrative. The structure of the simple narrative is as different from the structure of the short story as the structure of the prose romance is from the structure of the novel. Since there are already two categories for long prose

fiction, it seems reasonable to suggest two categories for short fiction, particularly since there is greater similarity between the short story and the prose romance than there is between the short story and the novel or the short story and the simple narrative.

Given the distinction that I make, the evaluation of short fiction should be easier and more valid, and evaluation I take to be the purpose of criticism.

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